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THE GOLDEN CALF

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

In Three Volumes.

VOL. I.

LONDON

JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL

MILTON HOUSE, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET

1883

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THE GOLDEN CALF.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARTICLED PUPIL.

'WHERE is Miss Palliser?' inquired Miss Pew, in that awful voice of hers, at which the class-room trembled, as at unexpected thunder. A murmur ran along the desks, from girl to girl, and then some one, near that end of the long room which was sacred to Miss Pew and her lieutenants, said that Miss Palliser was not in the class-room.

'I think she is taking her music lesson, ma'am,' faltered the girl who had ventured diffidently to impart this information to the schoolmistress.

'Think?' exclaimed Miss Pew, in her sten-

torian voice. 'How can you think about an absolute fact? Either she is taking her lesson, or she is not taking her lesson. There is no room for thought. Let Miss Palliser be sent for this moment.'

At this command, as at the behest of the Homeric Jove himself, half a dozen Irises started up to carry the ruler's message; but again Miss Pew's mighty tones resounded in the echoing class-room.

'I don't want twenty girls to carry one message. Let Miss Rylance go.'

There was a grim smile on the principal's coarsely-featured countenance as she gave this order. Miss Rylance was not one of the six who had started up to do the schoolmistress's bidding. She was a young lady who considered her mission in life anything rather than to carry a message—a young lady who thought herself quite the most refined and elegant thing at Mauleverer Manor, and so entirely superior to her surroundings as to be absolved from the necessity of being obliging. But Miss Pew's voice, when

fortified by anger, was too much even for Miss Rylance's calm sense of her own merits, and she rose at the lady's bidding, laid down her ivory penholder on the neatly-written exercise, and walked out of the room quietly, with the slow and stately deportment imparted by a long course of instruction from Madame Rigolette, the fashionable dancing-mistress.

'Rylance won't much like being sent on a message,' whispered Miss Cobb, the Kentish brewer's daughter, to Miss Mullins, the Northampton carriage-builder's heiress.

'And old Pew delights in taking her down a peg,' said Miss Cobb, who was short, plump, and ruddy, a picture of rude health and unrefined good looks—a girl who bore 'beer' written in unmistakable characters across her forehead, Miss Rylance had observed to her own particular circle. 'I will say that for the old lady,' added Miss Cobb, 'she never cottons to stuckupishness.'

Vulgarity of speech is the peculiar delight o a schoolgirl off duty. She spends so much of her life under the all-pervading eye of authority

she is so drilled, and lectured, and ruled and regulated, that, when the eye of authority is off her, she seems naturally to degenerate into licence. No speech so interwoven with slang as the speech of a schoolgirl—except that of a schoolboy.

There came a sudden hush upon the class-room after Miss Rylance had departed on her errand. It was a sultry afternoon in late June, and the four rows of girls seated at the two long desks in the long bare room, with its four tall windows facing a hot blue sky, felt almost as exhausted by the heat as if they had been placed under an air-pump. Miss Pew had a horror of draughts, so the upper sashes were only lowered a couple of inches, to let out the used atmosphere. There was no chance of a gentle west wind blowing in to ruffle the loose hair upon the foreheads of those weary students.

Thursday afternoons were devoted to the study of German. The sandy-haired young woman at the end of the room furthest from Miss Pew's throne was Fraulein Wolf, from Frankfort, and it was Fraulein Wolf's mission to go on eternally

explaining the difficulties of her native language to the pupils at Mauleverer Manor, and to correct those interesting exercises of Ollendorff's which ascend from the primitive simplicity of golden candlesticks and bakers' dogs, to the loftiest themes in romantic literature.

For five minutes there was no sound save the scratching of pens, and the placid voice of the Fraulein demonstrating to Miss Mullins that in an exercise of twenty lines, ten words out of every twenty were wrong, and then the door was opened suddenly—not at all in the manner so carefully instilled by the teacher of deportment. It was flung back, rather, as if with an angry hand, and a young woman, taller than the generality of her sex, walked quickly up the room to Miss Pew's desk, and stood before that bar of justice, with head erect, and dark flashing eyes, the incarnation of defiance.

'*Was für ein Mädchen!*' muttered the Fraulein, blinking at that distant figure, with her pale gray-green eyes.

Miss Pew pretended not to see the challenge

in the girl's angry eyes. She turned to her subordinate, Miss Pillby, the useful drudge who did a little indifferent teaching in English grammar and geography, looked after the younger girls' wardrobes, and toadied the mistress of the house.

'Miss Pillby, will you be kind enough to show Ida Palliser the state of her desk?' asked Miss Pew, with awe-inspiring politeness.

'She needn't do anything of the kind,' said Ida coolly. 'I know the state of my desk quite as well as she does. I daresay it's untidy. I haven't had time to put things straight.'

'Untidy!' exclaimed Miss Pew, in her appalling baritone, 'untidy is not the word. It's degrading. Miss Pillby, be good enough to call over the various articles which you have found in Ida Palliser's desk.'

Miss Pillby rose to do her employer's bidding. She was a dull piece of human machinery to which the idea of resistance to authority was impossible. There was no dirty work she would not have done meekly, willingly even, at Miss Pew's bidding. The girls were never tired of

expatiating upon Miss Pillby's meanness; but the lady herself did not even know that she was mean. She had been born so.

She went to the locker, lifted the wooden lid, and proceeded in a flat, drawling voice to call over the items which she found in that receptacle.

'A novel, "The Children of the Abbey," without a cover.'

'Ah!' sighed Miss Pew.

'One stocking, with a rusty darning-needle sticking in it. Five apples, two mouldy. A square of hardbake. An old neck-ribbon. An odd cuff. Seven letters. A knife, with the blade broken. A bundle of pen-and-ink—well, I suppose they are meant for sketches.'

'Hand them over to me, commanded Miss Pew.

She had seen some of Ida Palliser's pen-and-ink sketches before to-day—had seen herself represented in every ridiculous guise and attitude by that young person's facile pen. Her large cheeks reddened in anticipation of her pupil's insolence. She took the sheaf of crumpled paper and thrust it hastily into her pocket.

A ripple of laughter swept over Miss Palliser's resolute face; but she said not a word.

'Half a New Testament—the margins shamefully scribbled over,' pursued Miss Pillby, with implacable monotony. 'Three Brazil nuts. A piece of slate-pencil. The photograph of a little boy——'

'My brother,' cried Ida hastily. 'I hope you are not going to confiscate that, Miss Pew, as you have confiscated my sketches.'

'It would be no more than you deserve if I were to burn everything in your locker, Miss Palliser,' said the schoolmistress.

'Burn everything except my brother's portrait. I might never get another. Papa is so thoughtless. Oh, please, Miss Pillby, give me back the photo.'

'Give her the photograph,' said Miss Pew, who was not all inhuman, although she kept a school, a hardening process which is supposed to deaden the instincts of womanhood. 'And now, pray, Miss Palliser, what excuse have you to offer for your untidiness?'

'None,' said Ida, 'except that I have no time

to be tidy. You can't expect tidiness from a drudge like me.'

And with this cool retort, Miss Palliser turned her back upon her mistress and left the room.

'Did you ever see such cheek?' murmured the irrepressible Miss Cobb to her neighbour.

'She can afford to be cheeky,' retorted the neighbour. 'She has nothing to lose. Old Pew couldn't possibly treat her any worse than she does. If she did, it would be a police case.'

When Ida Palliser was in the little lobby outside the class room, she took the little boy's photograph from her pocket, and kissed it passionately. Then she ran upstairs to a small room on the landing, where there was nothing but emptiness and a worn out old square piano, and sat down for her hour's practice. She was always told off to the worst pianos in the house. She took out a book of five-finger exercises, by a Leipsic professor, placed it on the desk, and then, just as she was beginning to play, her whole frame was shaken like a bulrush in a sudden gust of wind; she let her head fall forward on the desk, and burst into

tears, hot, passionate tears, that came like a flood, in spite of her determination not to cry.

What was the matter with Ida Palliser? Not much, perhaps. Only poverty, and poverty's natural corollary, a lack of friends.

She was the handsomest girl in the school, and one of the cleverest—clever in an exceptional way, which claimed admiration even from the coldest. She occupied the anomalous position of a pupil teacher, or an articled pupil. Her father, a military man, living abroad on his half pay, with a young second wife, and a five-year old son, had paid Miss Pew a lump sum of fifty pounds, and for those fifty pounds Miss Pew had agreed to maintain and educate Ida Palliser during the space of three years, to give her the benefit of instruction from the masters who attended the school, and to befit her for the brilliant and lucrative career of governess in a gentleman's family. As a set-off against these advantages, Miss Pew had full liberty to exact what services she pleased from Miss Palliser, stopping short, as Miss Green had suggested, of a police case.

Miss Pew had not shown herself narrow in her ideas of the articled pupil's capacity. It was her theory that no amount of intellectual labour, including some manual duties in the way of assisting in the lavatory on tub-nights, washing hair-brushes, and mending clothes, could be too much for a healthy young woman of nineteen. She always talked of Ida as a young woman. The other pupils of the same age she called girls; but of Ida she spoke uncompromisingly as a 'young woman.'

'Oh, how I hate them all!' said Ida, in the midst of her sobs. 'I hate everybody, myself most of all!'

Then she pulled herself together with an effort, dried her tears hurriedly, and began her five-finger exercises, *tum tum, tum*, with the little finger, all the other fingers pinned resolutely down upon the keys.

'I wonder whether, if I had been ugly and stupid, they would have been a little more merciful to me?' she said to herself.

Miss Palliser's ability had been a disadvantage to her at Mauleverer Manor. When Miss Pew

discovered that the girl had a knack of teaching she enlarged her sphere of tuition, and from taking the lowest class only, as former articled pupils had done, Miss Palliser was allowed to preside over the second and third classes, and thereby saved her employers forty pounds a year.

To teach two classes, each consisting of from fifteen to twenty girls, was in itself no trifling labour. But besides this Ida had to give music lessons to that lowest class which she had ceased to instruct in English and French, and whose studies were now conducted by Miss Pillby. She had her own studies, and she was eager to improve herself, for that career of governess in a gentleman's family was the only future open to her. She used to read the advertisements in the governess column of the *Times* supplement, and it comforted her to see that an all-accomplished teacher demanded from eighty to a hundred a year for her services. A hundred a year was Ida's idea of illimitable wealth. How much she might do with such a sum! She could dress herself handsomely, she could save enough money

for a summer holiday in Normandy with her neglectful father and her weak little vulgar step-mother, and the half-brother, whom she loved better than anyone else in the world.

The thought of this avenue to fortune gave her fortitude. She braced herself up, and set herself valourously to unriddle the perplexities of a nocturne by Chopin.

'After all I have only to work on steadily,' she told herself; 'there will come an end to my slavery.'

Presently she began to laugh to herself softly:

'I wonder whether old Pew has looked at my caricatures,' she thought, 'and whether she'll treat me any worse on account of them?'

She finished her hour's practice, put her music back into her portfolio, which lived in an ancient canterbury under the ancient piano, and went to the room where she slept, in company with seven other spirits, as mischievous and altogether evilly disposed as her own.

Mauleverer Manor had not been built for a school, or it would hardly have been called a

manor. There were none of those bleak, bare dormitories, specially planned for the accommodation of thirty sleepers—none of those barrack-like rooms which strike desolation to the soul. With the exception of the large class-room which had been added at one end of the house, the manor was very much as it had been in the days of the Mauleverers, a race now as extinct as the Dodo. It was a roomy, rambling old house of the time of the Stuarts, and bore the date of its erection in many unmistakable peculiarities. There were fine rooms on the ground floor, with handsome chimney-pieces and oak panelling There were small low rooms above, curious old passages, turns and twists, a short flight of steps here, and another flight there, various levels, irregularities of all kinds, and, in the opinion of every servant who had ever lived in the house, an unimpeachable ghost. All Miss Pew's young ladies believed firmly in that ghost; and there was a legend of a frizzy-haired girl from Barbadoes who had seen the ghost, and had incontinently gone out of one epileptic fit into another, until her father had

come in a fly—presumably from Barbadoes—and carried her away for ever, epileptic to the last.

Nobody at present located at Mauleverer Manor remembered that young lady from Barbadoes, nor had any of the existing pupils ever seen the ghost. But the general faith in him was unshaken. He was described as an elderly man in a snuff-coloured, square-cut coat, knee-breeches, and silk stockings rolled up over his knees. He was supposed to be one of the extinct Mauleverers; harmless and even benevolently disposed; given to plucking flowers in the garden at dusk; and to gliding along passages, and loitering on the stairs in a somewhat inane manner. The bolder-spirited among the girls would have given a twelvemonth's pocket-money to see him. Miss Pillby declared that the sight of that snuff-coloured stranger would be her death.

'I've a weak 'art, you know,' said Miss Pillby, who was not mistress of her aspirates,—she managed them sometimes, but they often evaded her,—' the doctors said so when I was quite a little thing.'

'Were you ever a little thing, Pillby?' asked Miss Rylance with superb disdain, the present Pillby being long and gaunt.

And the group of listeners laughed, with that frank laughter of schoolgirls, keenly alive to the ridiculous in other people.

There was as much difference in the standing of the various bedrooms at Mauleverer Manor as in that of the London squares, but in this case it was the inhabitants who gave character to the locality. The five-bedded room off the front landing was occupied by the stiffest and best behaved of the first division, and might be ranked with Grosvenor Square or Lancaster Gate. There were rooms on the second floor where girls of the second and third division herded in inelegant obscurity, the Bloomsbury and Camden Town of the mansion. On this storey, too, slept the rabble of girls under twelve—creatures utterly despicable in the minds of girls in their teens, and the rooms they inhabited ranked as low as St. Giles's.

Ida Palliser was fortunate enough to have a bed in the butterfly-room, so called on account

of a gaudy wall paper, whereon Camberwell Beauties disported themselves among roses and lilies in a strictly conventional style of art. The butterfly-room was the most fashionable and altogether popular dormitory at the Manor. It was the May Fair—a district not without a shade of Bohemianism, a certain fastness of tone. The wildest girls in the school were to be found in the butterfly-room.

It was a pleasant enough room in itself, even apart from its association with pleasant people. The bow-window looked out upon the garden and across the garden to the Thames, which at this point took a wide curve between banks shaded by old pollard willows. The landscape was purely pastoral. Beyond the level meadows came an undulating line of low hill and woodland, with here and there a village spire dark against the blue.

Mauleverer Manor lay midway between Hampton and Chertsey, in a land of meadows and gardens which the speculating builder had not yet invaded.

The butterfly-room was furnished a little better than the common run of boarding-school bedchambers. Miss Pew had taken a good deal of the Mauleverer furniture at a valuation when she bought the old house; and the Mauleverer furniture being of a *rococo* and exploded style, the valuation had been ridiculously low. Thus it happened that a big wainscot wardrobe, with doors substantial enough for a church, projected its enormous bulk upon one side of the butterfly-room, while a tall, narrow, cheval glass stood in front of a window.

That cheval was the glory of the butterfly-room. The girls could see how their skirts hung, and if the backs of their dresses fitted. On Sunday mornings there used to be an incursion of outsiders, eager to test the effect of their Sabbath bonnets, and the sets of their jackets, by the cheval.

And now Ida Palliser came into the butterfly-room, yawning wearily, to brush herself up a little before tea, knowing that Miss Pew and her younger sister, Miss Dulcibella—who devoted herself to dress and the amenities of life generally

—would scrutinize her with eyes only too ready to see anything amiss.

The butterfly-room was not empty. Miss Rylance was plaiting her long flaxen hair in front of the toilet table, and another girl, a plump little sixteen-year-old, with nut-brown hair, and a fresh complexion, was advancing and retiring before the cheval, studying the effect of a cherry-coloured neck-ribbon with a gray gown.

'Cherry's a lovely colour in the abstract,' said this damsel, 'but it reminds one too dreadfully of barmaids.'

'Did you ever see a barmaid?' asked Miss Rylance languidly, slowly winding the long flaxen plait into a shining knob at the back of her head, and contemplating her reflection placidly with large calm blue eyes which saw no fault in the face they belonged to.

With features so correctly modelled, and a complexion so delicately tinted, Miss Rylance ought to have been lovely. But she had escaped loveliness by a long way. There was something wanting, and that something was very big.

'Good gracious, yes; I've seen dozens of barmaids,' answered Bessie Wendover, with her frank voice. 'Do you suppose I've never been into an hotel, or even into a tavern? When I go for a long drive with papa he generally wants brandy and soda, and that's how I get taken into the bar and introduced to the barmaid.'

'When you say introduced, of course you don't mean it,' said Miss Rylance, fastening her brooch. 'Calling things by their wrong names is your idea of wit.'

'I would rather have a mistaken idea of wit than none at all,' retorted Miss Wendover, and then she pirouetted on the tips of her toes, and surveyed her image in the glass from head to foot, with an aggravated air. "I hope I'm not vulgar looking, but I'm rather afraid I am,' she said. 'What's the good of belonging to an old Saxon family if one has a thick waist and large hands?'

'What's the good of anything at Mauleverer Manor?' asked Ida, coming into the room, and seating herself on the ground with a dejected air.

Bessie Wendover ran across the room and sat down beside her.

'So you were in for it again this afternoon, you poor dear thing,' she murmured, in a cooing voice. 'I wish I had been there. It would have been 'Up Guards, and at 'em!' if I had. I'm sure I should have said something cheeky to old Pew. The idea of overhauling your locker! I should just like her to see the inside of mine. It would make her blood run cold.'

'Ah!' sighed Ida, 'she can't afford to make an example of you. You mean a hundred and fifty pounds a year. I am of no more account in her eyes than an artist's lay figure, which is put away in a dark closet when it isn't in use. She wanted to give you girls a lesson in tidiness, so she put me into her pillory. Fortunately I'm used to the pillory.'

'But you are looking white and worried, you dear lovely thing,' exclaimed Bessie, who was Ida Palliser's bosom friend. "It's too bad the way they use you. Have this neck-ribbon,' suddenly untying the bow so carefully elaborated five

minutes ago. 'You must, you shall; I don't want it; I hate it. Do, dear.'

And for consolation Miss Wendover tied the cherry-coloured ribbon under her friend's collar, patted Ida's pale cheeks, and kissed and hugged her.

'Be happy, darling, do,' she said, in her loving half-childish way, while Miss Rylance looked on with ineffable contempt. 'You are so clever and so beautiful; you were born to be happy.'

'Do you think so, pet?' asked Ida, with cold scorn; 'then I ought to have been born with a little more money.'

'What does money matter?' cried Bessie.

'Not very much to a girl like you, who has never known the want of it.'

'That's not true, darling. I never go home for the holidays that I don't hear father grumble about his poverty. The rents are so slow to come in; the tenants are always wanting drain-pipes and barns and things. Last Christmas his howls were awful. We are positive paupers. Mother has to wait ages for a cheque.'

'Ah, my pet, that's a very different kind of poverty from mine. You have never known what it is to have only three pairs of wearable stockings.'

Bessie looked as if she were going to cry.

'If you were not so disgustingly proud, you horrid thing, you need never feel the want of stockings,' she said discontentedly.

'If it were not for what you call my disgusting pride, I should degenerate into that loathsome animal a sponge,' said Ida, rising suddenly from her dejected attitude, and standing up before her admiring little friend,

'A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
And most divinely fair.'

That fatal dower of beauty had been given to Ida Palliser in fullest measure. She had the form of a goddess, a head proudly set upon shoulders that were sloping but not narrow, the walk of a Moorish girl, accustomed to carrying a water-jug on her head, eyes dark as night, hair of a deep warm brown rippling naturally across her broad forehead, a complexion of creamiest white and richest carnation. These were but the sensual

parts of beauty which can be catalogued. But it was in the glorious light and variety of expression that Ida shone above all compeers. It was by the intellectual part of her beauty that she commanded the admiration—enthusiastic in some cases, in others grudging and unwilling—of her schoolfellows, and reigned by right divine, despite her shabby gowns and her cheap ready-made boots, the belle of the school.

CHAPTER II.

'I AM GOING TO MARRY FOR MONEY.'

When a schoolgirl of sixteen falls in love with one of her schoolfellows there are no limits to her devotion. Bessie Wendover's adoration of Miss Palliser was boundless. Ida's seniority of three years, her beauty, her talent, placed her, as it were, upon a pinnacle in the eyes of the younger girl. Her poverty, her inferior position in the school, only made her more interesting to the warm-hearted Bessie, who passionately resented any slight offered to her friend. It was in vain that Miss Rylance took Bessie to task, and demonstrated the absurdity of this childish fancy for a young person whose future sphere of life must be necessarily remote from that of a Hampshire squire's daughter. Bessie despised this worldly wisdom.

'What is the use of attaching yourself to a girl whom you are never likely to see after you leave school?' argued Miss Rylance.

'I shall see her. I shall ask her home,' said Bessie, sturdily.

'Do you think your people will let you?'

'Mother will do anything I ask her, and father will do anything mother asks him. I am going to have Ida home with me all the summer holidays.'

'How do you know that she will come?'

'I shall make her come. It is very nasty of you to insinuate that she won't.'

'Palliser has a good deal of pride—pride and poverty generally go together, don't you know. I don't think she'll care about showing herself at the Grange in her old clothes and her three pairs of stockings, one on, one off, and one at the laundress's,' said Miss Rylance, winding up with a viperish little laugh, as if she had said something witty.

She had a certain influence with Bessie, whom she had known all her life. It was she who had

inspired Bessie with the desire to come to Maul-everer Manor, to be finished, after having endured eight years of jogtrot education from a homely little governess at home—who grounded the boys in Latin and mathematics before they went to Winchester, and made herself generally useful. Miss Rylance was the daughter of a fashionable physician, whose head-quarters were in Cavendish Square, but who spent his leisure at a something which he called 'a place' at Kingthorpe, a lovely little village between Winchester and Romsey, where the Wendovers were indigenous to the soil, whence they seemed to have sprung, like the armed men in the story; for remotest tradition bore no record of their having come there from anywhere else, nor was there record of a time when the land round Kingthorpe belonged to any other family.

Dr. Rylance, whose dainty verandah-shaded cottage stood in gardens of three and a half acres, and who rented a paddock for his cow, was always lamenting that he could not buy more land.

'The Wendovers have everything,' he said.

'It is impossible for a new man to establish himself.'

It was to be observed, however, that when land within a reasonable distance of Kingthorpe came into the market, Dr. Rylance did not put himself forward as a buyer. His craving for more territory always ended in words.

Urania Rylance had spent much of her girlhood at Kingthorpe, and had always been made welcome at The Knoll; but although she saw the Wendovers established upon their native soil, the rulers of the land, and revered by all the parish, she had grown up with the firm conviction that Dr. Rylance, of Cavendish Square, and Dr. Rylance's daughter were altogether superior to these country bumpkins, with their narrow range of ideas and their strictly local importance.

The summer days wore on at Mauleverer Manor, not altogether unpleasantly for the majority of the girls, who contrived to enjoy their lives in spite of Miss Pew's tyranny, which was considered vile enough to rank that middle-aged,

loud-voiced lady with the Domitians and Attilas of history. There was a softening influence, happily, in the person of Miss Dulcibella, who was slim and sentimental, talked about sweetness and light, loved modern poetry, spent all her available funds upon dress, and was wonderfully girlish in her tastes and habits at nine-and-thirty years of age.

It was a splendid summer, a time of roses and sunshine, and the girls were allowed to carry on their studies in the noble old garden, in the summer-houses and pleasure domes which the extinct Mauleverers had made for themselves in their day of power. Grinding at history, grammar, and geography did not seem so oppressive a burden when it could be done under the shade of spreading cedars, amid the scent of roses, in an atmosphere of colour and light. Even Ida's labours seemed a little easier when she and her pupils sat in a fast decaying old summer-house in the rose-garden, with a glimpse of sunlit river flashing athwart the roses.

So the time wore on until the last week in

July, and then all the school was alive with excitement, and every one was looking forward to the great event of the term, 'breaking up.' 'Old Pew,' had sent out her invitations for a garden party, an actual garden party—not a mere namby-pamby entertainment among the girls themselves, in which a liberal supply of blancmange and jam tarts was expected to atone for the absence of the outside world. Miss Pew had taken it into her head that Mauleverer Manor ought to be better known, and that a garden party would be a good advertisement. With this idea, she had ordered a hundred invitation cards, and had disseminated them among the most eligible of her old pupils, and the parents and guardians of those damsels now at the Manor. The good old gardens, where velvet greensward and cedars of Lebanon cost little labour to maintain in perfect order, were worthy to be exhibited. The roses, Miss Dulcibella's peculiar care, were, in that lady's opinion, equal to anything outside Chatsworth or Trentham. A garden party, by all means, said Miss Dulcibella, and she gave the

young ladies to understand that the whole thing was her doing.

'I waited till Sarah was in a good temper,' she told her satellites, half a dozen or so of the elder girls who worshipped her, and who, in the slang phraseology of the school, were known as Miss Dulcie's 'cracks,' 'and then I proposed a garden party. It required a great deal of talking to bring her even to think about such a thing. You see the expense will be enormous! Ices, tea and coffee, cakes, sandwiches, claret-cup. Thank goodness it's too late in the year for people to expect strawberries. Yes, my dears, you may thank me for your garden party.'

'Dear Miss Dulcibella,' exclaimed one.

'You too delicious darling,' cried another.

'What will you wear?' asked a third, knowing that Miss Dulcie was weak about dress, and had a morbid craving for originality.

'Well dears,' began Miss Dulcie, growing radiant at the thrilling question, 'I have been thinking of making up my art needlework tunic—the pale green, you know, with garlands of passion

flowers, worked in crewels—over a petticoat of the faintest primrose.'

'That will be quite too lovely,' exclaimed four enthusiasts in a chorus.

'You know how fond I am of those delicate tints in that soft Indian cashmere, that falls in such artistic folds.'

'Heavenly,' sighed the chorus, and Miss Dulcie went on talking for half-an-hour by Chertsey clock, in fact till the tea-bell broke up the little conclave.

What was Ida Palliser going to wear at the garden party? The question was far more serious for her than for Miss Dulcibella, who had plenty of money to spend upon her adornment. In Ida the necessity for a new gown meant difficulty, perhaps mortification.

'Why should I not spend the day in one of the garrets, darning stockings and packing boxes?' she said bitterly, when a grand discussion about the garden party was being held in the butterfly-room; 'nobody will want me. I have no relations coming to admire me.'

'You know you don't mean what you say,' said Miss Rylance. 'You expect to have half a dozen prizes, and to lord it over all of us.'

'I have worked hard enough for the prizes,' answered Ida. 'I don't think you need grudge me them.'

'I do not,' said Miss Rylance, with languid scorn. 'You know I never go in for prizes. My father looks upon school as only a preliminary kind of education. When I am at home with him in the season I shall have lessons from better masters than any we are favoured with here.'

'What a comfort it is for us to know that!' retorted Ida, her eyes dancing mischievously.

It was now within a week of the garden party. Miss Pew was grimmer of aspect and louder of voice than usual, and it was felt that, at the slightest provocation, she might send forth an edict revoking all her invitations, and the party might be relegated to the limbo of unrealized hopes. Never had the conduct of Miss Pew's pupils been so irreproachable, never had lessons been learned, and exercises prepared, so diligently.

Ida had received a kind little note from Mrs. Wendover, asking her to spend her summer holidays at Kingthorpe, and at Bessie's earnest desire had accepted the cordial invitation.

'You don't know what a foolish thing you are doing, Bess,' said Miss Palliser, when—reluctant to the last—she had written her acceptance, Bessie looking over her shoulder all the while. 'Foolish for you, foolish for me. It is a mistake to associate yourself with paupers. You will feel ashamed of me half a dozen times a day at Kingthorpe.'

'No, no, no!' cried the energetic Bessie; 'I shall never feel anything but pride in you. I shall be proud to show my people what a beautiful, brilliant, wonderful friend I have chosen for myself.'

'Ardent child!' exclaimed Ida, with a touch of sadness even in her mockery. 'What a pity you have not a bachelor brother to fall in love with me!'

Never mind the brother. I have two bachelor cousins.'

'Of course! The rich Brian, and the poor Brian, whose histories I have heard almost as often as I heard the story of "Little Red Ridinghood" in my nursery days. Both good-looking, both clever, both young. One a man of landed estate. All Kingthorpe parish belongs to him, does it not?'

'All except the little bit that belongs to papa.'

'And Dr. Rylance's garden and paddock; don't forget that.'

'Could I forget the Rylances? Urania says that although her father has no land at Kingthorpe, he has influence.'

'The other cousin dependent on his talents, and fighting his way at the Bar. Is not that how the story goes, Bess?'

'Yes, darling. I am afraid poor Brian has hardly begun fighting yet. He is only eating his terms. I have no idea what that means, but it sounds rather low.'

'Well, Bess, if I am to marry either of your cousins, it must be the rich one,' said Ida, decisively.

'Oh, Ida, how can you say so? You can't know which you will like best.'

'My likes and dislikes have nothing to do with it. I am going to marry for money.'

Miss Rylance had brought her desk to that end of the table where the two girls were sitting, during the latter part of the conversation. It was evening, the hour or so of leisure allowed for the preparation of studies and the writing of home letters. Miss Rylance unlocked her desk, and took out her paper and pens; but, having got so far as this, she seemed rather inclined to join in the conversation than to begin her letter.

'Isn't that rather a worldly idea for your time of life?' she asked, looking at Ida with her usual unfriendly expression.

'No doubt. I should be disgusted if you or Bessie entertained such a notion. But in me it is only natural. I have drained the cup of poverty to the dregs. I thirst for the nectar of wealth. I would marry a soap-boiler, a linseed-crusher, a self-educated navvy who had developed into a great

contractor—any plebian creature, always provided that he was an honest man.'

'How condescending!' said Miss Rylance. 'I suppose, Bessie, you know that Miss Pew has especially forbidden us all to indulge in idle talk about courtship and marriage?'

'Quite so,' said Bessie, 'but as old Pew knows that we are human, I've no doubt she is quite aware that this is one of her numerous rules which we diligently set at naught.'

Urania began her letter, but although her pen moved swiftly over her paper in that elegant Italian hand which was, as it were, a badge of honour at Mauleverer Manor, her ears were not the less open to the conversation going on close beside her.

'Marry a soap-boiler, indeed!' exclaimed Bessie, indignantly; 'you ought to be a duchess!'

'No doubt, dear, if dukes went about the world like King Cophetua, on the look out for beggar-maids.'

'I am so happy to think you are coming to Kingthorpe! It is the dearest old place! We shall be so happy!'

'It will not be your fault if we are not, darling,' said Ida, looking tenderly at the loving face, uplifted to hers. 'Well, I have written to my father to ask him for five pounds, and if he send the five pounds I will go to Kingthorpe. If not, I must invent an excuse—mumps, or measles, or something—for staying away. Or I must behave so badly for the last week of the term that old Pew will revoke her sanction of the intended visit. I cannot come to Kingthorpe quite out at elbows.'

'You look lovely even in the gown you have on,' said Bessie.

'I don't know anything about my loveliness, but I know that this gown is absolutely threadbare.'

Bessie sighed despondently. She knew her friend's resolute temper, and that any offer of clothes or money from her would be worse than useless. It would make Ida angry.

'What kind of man is your father, darling?' she asked, thoughtfully.

'Very good-natured.'

'Ah! Then he will send the five pounds'

'Very weak.'

'Ah! Then he may change his mind about it.'

'Very poor.'

'Then he may not have the money.'

'The lot is in the urn of fate, Bess. We must take our chance. I think, somehow, that the money will come. I have asked for it urgently, for I do want to come to Kingthorpe.' Bessie kissed her. 'Yes, dear, I wish with all my heart to accept your kind mother's invitation; though I know, in my secret soul, that it is foolishness for me to see the inside of a happy home, to sit beside a hospitable hearth, when it is my mission in life to be a dependent in the house of a stranger. If you had half a dozen small sisters, now, and your people would engage me as a nursery governess——"

'You a nursery governess!' cried Bessie, "you who are at the top of every class, and who do everything better than the masters who teach you?'

'Well, if my perfection prove worth seventy pounds a-year when I go out into the world, I shall be satisfied,' said Ida.

"What will you buy with your five pounds?' asked Bessie.

'A black cashmere gown, as plain as a nun's, a straw hat, and as many collars, cuffs, and stockings as I can get for the rest of the money.'

Miss Rylance listened, smiling quietly to herself as she bent over her desk. To the mind of an only daughter, who had been brought up in a supremely correct manner, who had had her winter clothes and summer clothes at exactly the right season, and of the best that money could buy, there was a piteous depth of poverty and degradation in Ida Palliser's position. The girl's beauty and talents were as nothing when weighed against such sordid surroundings.

The prize-day came, a glorious day at the beginning of August, and the gardens of Maul-everer Manor, the wide reach of blue river, the meadows, the willows, the distant woods, all looked their loveliest, as if Nature was playing into the hands of Miss Pew.

'I am sure you girls ought to be very happy

to live in such a place!' said one of the mothers, as she strolled about the velvet lawn with her daughters, 'instead of being mewed up in a dingy London square.'

'You wouldn't say that if you saw the bread and scrape and the sloppy tea we have for breakfast,' answered one of the girls. 'It's all very well for you, who see this wretched hole in the sunshine, and old Pew in her best gown and her company manners. The place is a whited sepulchre. I should like you to have a glimpse behind the scenes, ma.'

'Ma' smiled placidly, and turned a deaf ear to these aspersions of the schoolmistress. Her girls looked well fed and healthy. Bread and scrape evidently agreed with them much better than that reckless consumption of butter and marmalade which swelled the housekeeping bills during the holidays.

It was a great day. Miss Pew the elder was splendid in apple-green moiré antique; Miss Pew the younger was elegant in pale and flabby raiment of cashmere and crewel-work. The girls were in

that simple white muslin of the *jeune Meess Anglaise*, to which they were languishing to bid an eternal adieu. There were a great many pretty girls at Mauleverer Manor, and on this day, when the white-robed girlish forms were flitting to and fro upon the green lawns, in the sweet summer air and sunshine, it seemed as if the old manorial mansion were a bower of beauty. Among the parents of existing pupils who had accepted the Misses Pew's invitation was Dr. Rylance, the fashionable physician, whose presence there conferred distinction upon the school. It was Miss Rylance's last term, and the doctor wished to assist at those honours which she would doubtless reap as the reward of meritorious studies. He was not blindly devoted to his daughter, but he was convinced that, like everything else belonging to him, she was of the best quality; and he expected to see her appreciated by the people who had been privileged to educate her.

The distribution of prizes was the great feature of the day. It was to take place at four o'clock, in the ball-room, a fine old panelled saloon, in

which the only furniture was a pair of grand pianos, somewhat the worse for wear, a table at the end of the room on which the prizes were arranged, and benches covered with crimson cloth for the accommodation of the company.

There was to be a concert before the distribution. Four of the best pianoforte players in the school were to hammer out an intensely noisy version of the overture to *Zampa*, arranged for eight hands on two pianos. The crack singer was to sing 'Una voce,' and Ida Palliser was to play the 'Moonlight Sonata.'

Dr. Rylance had come early, on purpose to be present at this ceremonial. He was the most important guest who had yet arrived, and Miss Pew devoted herself to his entertainment, and went rustling up and down the terrace in front of the ball-room windows in her armour of apple-green moiré, listening deferentially to the physician's remarks.

Dr. Rylance was a large fair-complexioned man, who had been handsome in his youth, and who at seven-and-forty was still remarkably good-looking. He had fine teeth, good hair, full blue eyes, capable

of the hardest, coldest stare that ever looked out of a human countenance. Mr. Darwin has told us that the eyes do not smile, that the radiance we fancy we see in the eye itself is only produced by certain contractions of the muscles surrounding it. Assuredly there was no smile in the eyes of Dr. Rylance. His smile, which was bland and frequent, gave only a vague impression of white teeth and brown whiskers. He had a fine figure, and was proud of his erect carriage. He dressed carefully and well, and was as particular as Brummell about his laundress. His manners were considered pleasing by the people who liked him: while those who disliked him accused him of an undue estimate of his own merits, and a tendency to depreciate the rest of humanity. His practice was rather select than extensive, for Dr. Rylance was a specialist. He had won his reputation as an adviser in cases of mental disease; and as, happily, mental diseases are less common than bodily ailments, Dr. Rylance had not the continuous work of a Gull or a Jenner. His speciality paid him remarkably well. His cases hung long on hand,

and when he had a patient of wealth and standing Dr. Rylance knew how to keep him. His treatment was soothing and palliative, as befitted an enlightened age. In an age of scepticism no one could expect Dr. Rylance to work miraculous cures. It is in no wise to his discredit to say that he was more successful in sustaining and comforting the patient's friends than in curing the patient.

This was Laurence Rylance, a man who had begun life in a very humble way, had raised himself by his own efforts, if not to the top of the medical tree, certainly to a very comfortable and remunerative perch among its upper branches; a man thoroughly satisfied with himself and with what destiny had done for him; a man who, to be a new Cæsar, would hardly have foregone the privilege of being Laurence Rylance.

"My daughter has done well during this last term, I hope, Miss Pew?" he said, interrogatively, but rather as if the question were needless, as he walked beside the rustling moiré.

'She has earned my entire approval,' replied Miss Pew, in her oiliest accents. 'She has

application.' Dr. Rylance nodded assentingly. 'She has a charming deportment. I know of no girl in the school more thoroughly ladylike. I have never seen her with a collar put on crookedly, or with rough hair. She is a pattern to many of my girls.'

'That is all gratifying to my pride as a father; but I hope she has made progress in her studies.'

Miss Pew coughed gently behind a mittened hand.

'She has not made quite so great an advance as I should have wished. She has talent, no doubt; but it is hardly of a kind that comes into play among other girls. In after-life, perhaps, there may be development. I am sorry to say she is not in our roll-call of honour to-day. She has won no prize.'

'Perhaps she may have hardly thought it worth her while to compete,' said Dr. Rylance, hurt in his own individual pride by the idea that his daughter had missed distinction, just as he would have been hurt if anybody had called one of his pictures a copy, or made light of his blue china. 'With the Rylances it has always been Cæsar or nothing.'

'I regret to say that my three most important prizes have been won by a young woman whom I cannot esteem,' said Miss Pew, bristling in her panoply of apple-green, at the thought of Ida Palliser's insolence. 'I hope I shall ever be just, at whatever sacrifice of personal feeling. I shall to-day bestow the first prize for modern languages, for music, and for English history and literature, upon a young person of whose moral character I have a very low opinion.'

'And pray who is this young lady?' asked Dr. Rylance.

'Miss Palliser, the daughter of a half-pay officer residing in the neighbourhood of Dieppe—for very good reasons, no doubt.'

'Palliser; yes, I have heard my daughter talk of her. An insolent, ill-bred girl. I have been taught to consider her somewhat a disgrace to your excellent and well-managed school.'

'Her deportment is certainly deplorable,' admitted Miss Pew; 'but the girl has remarkable talents.'

More visitors were arriving from this time

forward, until everyone was seated in the ball-room. Miss Pew was engaged in receiving people, and ushering them to their seats, always assisted by Miss Dulcibella—an image of limp gracefulness—and the three governesses—all as stiff as perambulating blackboards. Dr. Rylance strolled by himself for a little while, sniffed at the great ivory cup of a magnolia, gazed dreamily at the river—shining yonder across intervening gardens and meadows—and ultimately found his daughter.

'I am sorry to find you are not to be honoured with a prize, Ranie,' he said, smiling at her gently.

In no relation of life had he been so nearly perfect as in his conduct as a father. Were he ever so disappointed in his daughter, he could not bring himself to be angry with her.

'I have not tried for prizes, papa. Why should I compete with such a girl as Ida Palliser, who is to get her living as a governess, and who knows that success at school is a matter of life and death with her?'

'Do you not think it might have been worth

your while to work as hard as Miss Palliser, for the mere honour and glory of being first in your school?'

'Did you ever work for mere honour and glory, papa?' asked Urania, with her unpleasant little air of cynicism.

'Well, my love, I confess there has been generally a promise of solid pudding in the background. Pray, who is this Miss Palliser, whom I hear of at every turn, and whom nobody seems to like?'

'There you are mistaken, papa. Miss Palliser has her worshippers, though she is the most disagreeable girl in the school. That silly little Bessie raves about her, and has actually induced Mrs. Wendover to invite her to The Knoll!'

'That is a pity, if the girl is ill-bred and unpleasant,' said Dr. Rylance.

'She's a horror,' exclaimed Urania, vindictively.

Five minutes later Dr. Rylance and his daughter made their entrance into the ball-room, which was full of people, and whence came the opening crash of an eight-handed 'Zampa.' Father and daughter went in softly, and with a hushed air, as if they

had been going into church; yet the firing of a cannon or two more or less would hardly have disturbed the performers at the two pianos, so tremendous was their own uproar. They were taking the overture in what they called orchestral time; though it is doubtful whether even their playing could have kept pace with the hurrying of excited fiddles in a presto passage, or the roll of the big drum, simulating distant thunder. Be that as it may, the four performers were pounding along at a breathless pace; and if their pianissimo passages failed in delicacy, there was no mistake about their fortissimo.

'What an abominable row!' whispered Dr. Rylance. 'Is this what they call music?'

Urania smiled, and felt meritorious in that, after being chosen as one of the four for this very 'Zampa,' she had failed ignominiously as a timist, and had been compelled to cede her place to another pupil.

'I might have toiled for six weeks at the horrid thing,' she thought, 'and papa would have only called it a row'

'Zampa' ended amidst polite applause, the delighted parents of the four players feeling that they had not lived in vain. And now the music mistress took her place at one of the pianos, the top of the instrument was lowered, and Miss Fane, a little fair girl with a round face and frizzy auburn hair, came simpering forward to sing "Una voce," in a reedy soprano, which had been attenuated by half-guinea lessons from an Italian master, and which frequently threatened a snap.

Happily on this occasion the thin little voice got through its work without disaster; there was a pervading sense of relief when the crisis was over, and Miss Fane had simpered her acknowledgments of the applause which rewarded a severely conscientious performance.

'Any more singing?' inquired Dr. Rylance of his daughter, not with the air of a man who pants for vocal melody.

'No, the next is the "Moonlight Sonata."'

Dr. Rylance had a dim idea that he had heard of this piece before. He waited dumbly, admiring the fine old room, with its lofty ceiling, and florid

cornice, and the sunny garden beyond the five tall windows.

Presently Ida Palliser came slowly towards the piano, carrying herself like an empress. Dr. Rylance could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes. Was this the girl whose deportment had been called abominable, whom Urania had denounced as a horror? Was this the articled pupil, the girl doomed to life-long drudgery as a governess, this superb creature, with her noble form and noble face, looking grave defiance at the world which hitherto had not used her too kindly?

She was dressed in black, a sombre figure amidst the white muslins and rainbow sashes of her comrades. Her cashmere gown was of the simplest fashion, but it became the tall full figure to admiration. Below her linen collar she wore a scarlet ribbon, from which hung a silver locket, the only ornament she possessed. It was Bessie Wendover who had insisted on the scarlet ribbon, as a relief to that funereal gown.

'I was never so surprised in my life,' whispered Dr. Rylance to his daughter. 'She is the handsomest girl I ever saw.'

'Yes, she is an acknowledged beauty,' said Urania, with a contraction of her thin lips; 'nobody disputes her good looks. It is a pity her manners are so abominable.'

'She moves like a lady.'

'She has been thoroughly drilled,' sneered Urania. 'The original savage in her has been tamed as much as possible.'

'I should like to know more of that girl,' said Dr. Rylance, 'for she looks as if she has force of character. I'm sorry you and she are not better friends.'

Ida seated herself at the piano and began to play, without honouring the assembly with one glance from her dark eyes. She sat looking straight before her, like one whose thoughts are far away. She played by memory, and at first her hands faltered a little as they touched the keys, as if she hardly knew what she was going to play. Then she recollected herself in a flash, and began the firm, slow, legato movement with the touch of a master hand, the melody rising and falling in solemn waves of sound, like the long, slow roll of a calm sea.

The 'Moonlight Sonata' is a composition of some length. Badly, or even indifferently performed, the 'Moonlight Sonata' is a trial; but no one grew weary of it to-day, though the strong young hands which gave emphasis to the profound beauties of that wonderful work were only the hands of a girl. Those among the listeners who knew least about music, knew that this was good playing; those who cared not at all for the playing were pleased to sit and watch the mobile face of the player as she wove her web of melody, her expression changing with every change in the music, but unmoved by a thought of the spectators.

Presently, just as the sonata drew to its close, an auburn head was thrust between Dr. Rylance and his daughter, and a girl's voice whispered,

'Is she not splendid? Is she not the grandest creature you ever saw?'

The doctor turned and recognized Bessie Wendover.

'She is, Bessie,' he said, shaking hands with her. 'I never was so struck by anyone in my life.'

Urania grew white with anger. Was it not enough that Ida Palliser should have outshone her in every accomplishment upon which schoolgirls pride themselves? Was it not enough that she should have taken complete possession of that foolish little Bessie, and thus ingratiated herself into the Wendover set, and contrived to get invited to Kingthorpe? No. Here was Urania's own father, her especial property, going over to the enemy.

'I am glad you admire her so much, papa,' she said, outwardly calm and sweet, but inwardly consumed with anger; 'for it will be so pleasant for you to see more of her at Kingthorpe.'

'Yes,' he said, heartily, 'I am glad she is coming to Kingthorpe. That was a good idea of yours, Bessie.'

'Wasn't it? I am so pleased to find you like her. I wish you could get Ranie to think better of her.'

Now came the distribution of prizes and accessits. Miss Pew took her seat before the table on which the gaudily-bound books were arranged,

and began to read out the names. It was a hard thing for her to have to award the three first prizes to a girl she detested; but Miss Pew knew the little world she ruled well enough to know that palpable injustice would weaken her rule. Ninety-nine girls who had failed to win the prize would have resented her favouritism if she had given the reward to a hundredth girl who had not fairly won it. The eyes of her little world were upon her, and she was obliged to give the palm to the real victor. So, in her dull, hard voice, looking straight before her, with cold, unfriendly eyes, she read out—

'The prize for modern languages has been obtained by Miss Palliser!' and Ida came slowly up to the table and received a bulky crimson volume, containing the poetical works of Sir Walter Scott.

'The prize for proficiency in instrumental music is awarded to Miss Palliser!'

Another bulky volume was handed to Ida. For variety the binding was green, and the inside of the book was by William Cowper.

'The greatest number of marks for English history and literature have been obtained by Miss Palliser.'

Miss Palliser was now the happy possessor of a third volume, bound in blue, containing a selection from the works of Robert Southey.

With not one word of praise nor one smile of approval did Miss Pew sweeten the gifts which she bestowed upon the articled pupil. She gave that which justice, or rather policy, compelled her to give. No more. Kindliness was not in the bond.

Ida came slowly away from the table, laden with her prizes, her head held high, but not with pride in the trophies she carried. Her keenest feeling at this moment was a sense of humiliation. The prizes had been given her as a bone might be flung to a strange dog, by one whose heart held no love for the canine species. An indignant flush clouded the creamy whiteness of her forehead, angry tears glittered in her proud eyes. She made her way to the nearest door, and went away without a word to the crowd of younger

girls, her own pupils, who had crowded round to congratulate and caress her. She was adored by these small people, and it was her personal influence as much as her talent which made her so successful a teacher.

Dr. Rylance followed her to the door with his eyes. He was not capable of wide sympathies, or of projecting himself into the lives of other people; but he did sympathize with this girl, so lonely in the splendour of her beauty, so joyless in her triumph.

'God help her, poor child, in the days to come!' he said to himself.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE KNOLL.

Between Winchester and Romsey there lies a region of gentle hills and grassy slopes shadowed by fine old yew trees, a land of verdure, lonely and exceeding fair; and in a hollow of this undulating district nestles the village of Kingthorpe, with its half-dozen handsome old houses, its richly cultivated gardens, and quaint old square-towered church. It is a prosperous, well-to-do little settlement, where squalor and want are unknown. Its humbler dwellings belong chiefly to the labourers on the Wendover estate, and those are liberally paid and well cared for. An agricultural labourer's wages at Kingthorpe might seem infinitely small to a London mechanic; but when it is taken into account that the tiller of the fields has a roomy cottage and an acre of garden

for sixpence a-week, his daily dole of milk from the home farm, as much wood as he can burn, blankets and coals at Christmas, and wine and brandy, soup and bread from the great house, in all emergencies, he is perhaps not so very much worse off than his metropolitan brother.

There was an air of comfort and repose at Kingthorpe which made the place delightful to the eye of a passing wanderer—a spot where one would gladly have lain down the burden of life and rested for awhile in one of those white cottages that lay a little way back from the high road, shadowed by a screen of tall elms. There was a duck-pond in front of a low red brick inn which reminded one of Birkett Foster, and made the central feature of the village; a spot of busy life where all else was stillness. There were accommodation roads leading off to distant farms, above which the tree-tops interlaced, and where the hedges were rich in blackberry and sloe, dog-roses and honeysuckle, and the banks in spring-time dappled with violet and primrose, purple orchis and wild crocus, and all the flowers that grow for the delight of village children.

Ida Palliser sat silent in her corner of the large landau which was taking Miss Wendover and her schoolfellows from Winchester station to Kingthorpe. Miss Rylance had accepted a seat in the Wendover landau at her father's desire; but she would have preferred to have had her own smart little pony-carriage to meet her at the station. To drive her own carriage, were it ever so small, was more agreeable to Urania's temper than to sit behind the overfed horses from The Knoll, and to be thus, in some small measure, indebted to Bessie Wendover.

Ida Palliser's presence made the thing still more odious. Bessie was radiant with delight at taking her friend home with her. She watched Ida's eyes as they roamed over the landscape. She understood the girl's silent admiration.

'They are darling old hills, aren't they, dear?' she asked, squeezing Ida's hand, as the summer shadows and summer lights went dancing over the sward, like living things.

'Yes, dear, they are lovely,' answered Ida, quietly.

She was devouring the beauty of the scene with her eyes. She had seen nothing like it in her narrow wanderings over the earth — nothing so simple, so beautiful, and so lonely. She was sorry when they left that open hill country and came into a more fertile scene, a high road which was like an avenue in a gentleman's park, and then the village duck-pond and red homestead, the old gray church, with its gilded sun-dial marking the hour of six, the gardens brimming over with roses, and as full of sweet odours as those spicy islands which send their perfumed breath to greet the seaman as he sails to the land of the Sun.

The carriage stopped at the iron gate of an exquisitely kept garden, surrounding a small Gothic cottage of the fanciful order of architecture, —a cottage with plate-glass windows, shaded by Spanish blinds, a glazed verandah sheltering a tesselated walk, sloping banks and terraces, on a very small scale, stone vases full of flowers, a tiny fountain sparkling in the afternoon sun.

This was Dr. Rylance's country retreat. It

had been a yeoman's cottage, plain, substantial, and homely as the yeoman and his household. The doctor had added a Gothic front, increased the number of rooms, but not the general convenience of the dwelling. He had been his own architect, and the result was a variety of levels and a breakneck arrangement of stairs at all manner of odd corners, so ingenious in their peril to life and limb that they might be supposed to have been designed as traps for the ignorant stranger.

'Don't say good-bye, Ranie,' said Bessie, when Miss Rylance had alighted, and was making her adieux at the carriage door; 'you'll come over to dinner, won't you, dear? Your father won't be down till Saturday. You'll be dreadfully dull at home.'

'Thanks, dear, no; I'd rather spend my first evening at home. I'm never dull,' answered Urania, with her air of superiority.

'What a queer girl you are!' exclaimed Bessie, frankly. 'I should be wretched if I found myself alone in a house. Do run over in the

evening, at any rate. We are going to have lots of fun.'

Miss Rylance shuddered. She knew what was meant by lots of fun at The Knoll; a romping game at croquet, or the newly-established lawn-tennis, with girls in short petticoats and boys in Eton jackets; a raid upon the plum-trees on the crumbling red brick walls of the fine old kitchen-garden; winding up with a boisterous bout at hide-and-seek in the twilight; and finally a banquet of sandwiches, jam tarts, and syllabub in the shabby old dining-room.

'I'll come over to see Mrs. Wendover, if I am not too tired,' she said, with languid politeness, and then she closed the gate, and the carriage drove on to The Knoll.

Colonel Wendover's house was a substantial dwelling of the Queen Anne period, built of unmixed red brick, with a fine pediment, a stone shell over the entrance, four long narrow windows on each side of the tall door, and nine in each upper story, a house that looked all eyes, and was a blaze of splendour when the western sun

shone upon its many windows. The house stood on a bit of rising ground at the end of the village, and dominated all meaner habitations. It was the typical squire's house, and Colonel Wendover was no bad representative of the typical squire.

A fine old iron gate opened upon a broad gravel drive, which made the circuit of a well-kept *parterre*, where the flowers grew as they only grow for those who love them dearly. This gate stood hospitably open at all times, and many were the vehicles which drove up to the tall door of The Knoll, and friendly the welcome which greeted all comers.

The door, like the gate, stood open all day long —indeed, open doors were the rule at Kingthorpe. Ida saw a roomy old hall, paved with black and white marble, a few family portraits, considerably the worse for wear, against panelled walls painted white, a concatenation of guns, fishing-rods, whips, canes, cricket-bats, croquet-mallets, and all things appertaining to the out-door amusements of a numerous family. A large tiger skin stretched

before the drawing-room door was one memorial of Colonel Wendover's Indian life; a tiger's skull gleaming on the wall, between a pair of elephant's ears, was another. One side of the wall was adorned with a collection of Indian arms, showing all those various curves with which oriental ingenuity has improved upon the straight simplicity of the western sword.

It was not a neatly kept hall. There had been no careful study of colour in the arrangement of things—hats and caps were flung carelessly on the old oak chairs—there was a licentious mixture of styles in the furniture—half old English, half Indian, and all the worse for wear; but Ida Palliser thought the house had a friendly look, which made it better than any house she had ever seen before.

Through an open door at the back of the hall she saw a broad gravel walk, long and straight, leading to a temple or summer-house built of red brick, like the mansion itself. On each side of the broad walk there was a strip of grass, just about wide enough for a bowling-green, and on the

grass were orange-trees in big wooden tubs, painted green. Slowly advancing along the broad walk there came a large lady.

'Is that your mother?' asked Ida.

"No, it's Aunt Betsy. You ought to have known Aunt Betsy at a glance. I'm sure I've described her often enough. How good of her to be here to welcome us!' and Bessy flew across the hall and rushed down the broad walk to greet her aunt.

Ida followed at a more sober pace. Yes, she had heard of Aunt Betsy—a maiden aunt, who lived in her own house a little way from The Knoll. A lady who had plenty of money and decidedly masculine tastes, which she indulged freely; a very lovable person withal, if Bessy might be believed. Ida wondered if she too would be able to like Aunt Betsy.

Miss Wendover's appearance was not repulsive. She was a woman of heroic mould, considerably above the average height of womankind, with a large head nobly set upon large well-shaped shoulders. Bulky Miss Wendover decidedly was,

but she carried her bulkiness well. She still maintained a waist, firmly braced above her expansive hips. She walked well, and was more active than many smaller women. Indeed, her life was full of activity, spent for the most part in the open air, driving, walking, gardening, looking after her cows and poultry, and visiting the labouring-classes round Kingthorpe, among whom she was esteemed an oracle.

Bessie hung herself round her large aunt like ivy on an oak, and the two thus united came up the broad walk to meet Ida, Bessie chattering all the way.

'So this is Miss Palliser,' said Aunt Betsy heartily, and in a deep masculine voice, which accorded well with her large figure. 'I have heard a great deal about you from this enthusiastic child,—so much that I was prepared to be disappointed in you. It is the highest compliment I can pay you to say I am not.'

'Where's mother?' asked Bessie.

'Your father drove her to Romsey to call on the new vicar. There's the phaeton driving in at the gate.'

It was so. Before Ida had had breathing time to get over the introduction to Aunt Betsy, she was hurried off to see her host and hostess.

They were very pleasant people, who did not consider themselves called on to present an icy aspect to a new acquaintance.

The Colonel was the image of his sister, tall and broad of figure, with an aquiline nose and a commanding eye, thoroughly good-natured withal, and a man whom everybody loved. Mrs. Wendover was a dumpy little woman, who had brought dumpiness and a handsome fortune into the family. She had been very pretty in girlhood, and was pretty still, with a round-faced innocent prettiness which made her look almost as young as her eldest daughter. Her husband loved her with a fondly protecting and almost paternal affection, which was very pleasant to behold; and she held him in devoted reverence, as the beginning and end of all that was worth loving and knowing in the Universe. She was not an accomplished woman, and had made the smallest possible use of those opportunities which civilization affords to

every young lady whose parents have plenty of money; but she was a lady to the marrow of her bones—benevolent, kindly, thinking no evil, rejoicing in the truth—an embodiment of domestic love.

Such a host and hostess made Ida feel at home in their house in less than five minutes. If there had been a shade of coldness in their greeting her pride would have risen in arms against them, and she would have made herself eminently disagreeable. But at their hearty welcome she expanded like a beautiful flower which opens its lovely heart to the sunshine.

'It is so good of you to ask me here,' she said, when Mrs. Wendover had kissed her, 'knowing so little of me.'

'I know that my daughter loves you,' answered the mother, 'and it is not in Bessie's nature to love anyone who isn't worthy of love.'

Ida smiled at the mother's simple answer.

'Don't you think that in a heart so full of love some may run over and get wasted on worthless objects?' she asked.

'That's very true,' cried a boy in an Eton jacket, one of a troop that had congregated round the Colonel and his wife since their entrance. 'You know there was that half-bred terrier you doted upon, Bess, though I showed you that the roof of his mouth was as red as sealing-wax.'

'I hope you are not going to compare me to a half-bred terrier,' said Ida, laughing.

'If you were a terrier, the roof of your mouth would be as black as my hat,' said the boy decisively. It was his way of expressing his conviction that Ida was thoroughbred.

The ice being thus easily broken, Ida found herself received into the bosom of the family, and at once established as a favourite with all. There were two boys in Eton jackets, answering to the names of Reginald and Horatio, but oftener to the friendly abbreviations Reg. and Horry. Both had chubby faces, liberally freckled, warts on their hands, and rumpled hair; and it was not easy for a new comer to distinguish Horatio from Reginald, or Reginald from Horatio. There was a girl of fourteen with flowing hair, who looked

very tall because her petticoats were very short, and who always required some one to hug and hang upon. If she found herself deprived of human support she lolled against a wall.

This young person at once pounced upon Ida, as a being sent into the world to sustain her.

'Do you think you shall like me?' she asked, when they had all swarmed up to the long corridor, out of which numerous bed-rooms opened.

'I like you already,' answered Ida.

'Do thoo like pigs?' asked a smaller girl, round and rosy, in a holland pinafore, putting the question as if it were relevant to her sister's inquiry.

'I don't quite know,' said Ida doubtfully.

''Cos there are nine black oneths, tho pwutty. Will thoo come and thee them?'

Ida said she would think about it: and then she received various pressing invitations to go and see lop-eared rabbits, guinea-pigs, a tame water-rat in the rushes of the duck-pond, a collection of eggs in the schoolroom, and the new lawn-tennis ground which father had made in the paddock.

'Now all you small children run away!' cried Bessie, loftily. 'Ida and I are going to dress for dinner.'

The crowd dispersed reluctantly, with low mutterings about rabbits, pigs, and water-rats, like the murmurs of a stage mob; and then Bessie led her friend into a large sunny room fronting westward, a room with three windows, cushioned window-seats, two pretty white-curtained beds, and a good deal of old-fashioned and heterogeneous furniture, half English, half Indian.

'You said you wouldn't mind sleeping in my room,' said Bessie, as she showed her friend an exclusive dressing-table, daintily draperied, and enlivened with blue satin bows, for the refreshment of the visitor's eye.

While the girls were contemplating this work of art the door was suddenly opened and Blanche's head was thrust in.

'I did the dressing-table, Miss Palliser, every bit, on purpose for you.'

And the door then slammed to, and Bessie rushed across the room and drew the bolt.

'We shall have them all one after another,' she said.

'Don't shut them out on my account.'

'Oh, but I must. You would have no peace. I can see they are going to be appallingly fond of you.'

'Let them like me as much as they can. Do you know, Bessie, this is my first glimpse into the inside of a home!'

'Oh, Ida dear, but your father,' remonstrated Bessie.

'My father has never been unkind to me, but I have had no home with him. When my mother brought me home from India—she died very soon after we got home, you know'—Ida strangled a sob at this point—'I was placed with strangers, two elderly maiden ladies, who reared me very well, no doubt, in their stiff businesslike way, and who really gave me a very good education. That went on for nine years,—a long time to spend with two old maids in a dull little house at Turnham Green,—and then I had a letter from my father to say he had come home for good.

He had sold his commission and meant to settle down in some quiet spot abroad. His first duty would be to make arrangements for placing me in a high-class school, where I could finish my education; and he told me, quite at the end of his letter, that he had married a very sweet young lady, who was ready to give me all a mother's affection, and who would be able to receive me in my holidays, when the expense of the journey to France and back was manageable.'

'Poor darling!' sighed Bessie. 'Did your heart warm to the sweet young lady?'

'No, Bess; I'm afraid it must be an unregenerate heart, for I took a furious dislike to her. Very unjust and unreasonable, wasn't it? Afterwards, when my father took me over to his cottage, near Dieppe to spend my holidays, I found that my stepmother was a kind-hearted, pretty little thing, whom I might look down upon for her want of education, but whom I could not dislike. She was very kind to me; and she had a baby boy. I have told you about him, and how he and I fell in love with each other at first sight.'

'I am horribly jealous of that baby boy,' protested Bessie. 'How old is he now?'

'Nearly five. He was two years and a half old when I was at Les Fontaines, and that was before I went to Mauleverer Manor.'

'And you have been at Mauleverer Manor more than two years without once going home for the holidays,' said Bessie. 'That seems hard.'

'My dear, poverty is hard. It is all of a piece. It means deprivation, humiliation, degradation, the severance of friends. My father would have had me home if he could have afforded it; but he couldn't. He has only just enough to keep himself and his wife and boy. If you were to see the little box of a house they inhabit, in that tiny French village, you would wonder that anybody bigger than a pigeon could live in so small a place. They have a narrow garden, and there is an orchard on the slope of a hill behind the cottage, and a long white road leading to nowhere in front. It is all very nice in the summer, when one can live half one's life out of doors, but I am sure I don't know how they manage to exist through the winter.'

'Poor things!' sighed Bessie, who had a large stock of compassion always on hand.

And then she tied a bright ribbon at the back of Ida's collar, by way of finishing touch to the girl's simple toilet, which had been going on while they talked, and then, Bessie in white and Ida in black, like sunlight and shadow, they went downstairs to the drawing room, where Colonel Wendover was stretched on his favourite sofa reading a county paper. Since his retirement from active service into domestic idleness the Colonel had required a great deal of rest, and was to be found at all hours of the day extended at ease on his own particular sofa. During his intervals of activity he exhibited a large amount of energy. When he was indoors his stentorian voice penetrated from garret to cellar; when he was out of doors the same deep-toned thunder could be heard across a couple of paddocks. He pervaded the gardens and stables, supervised the home farm, and had a finger in every pie.

Mrs. Wendover was sitting in her own particular

arm-chair, close to her husband's sofa—they were seldom seen far apart—with a large basket of crewel-work beside her, containing sundry squares of kitchen towelling and a chaos of many-coloured wools, which never seemed to arrive at any result.

The impression which Mrs. Wendover's drawing-room conveyed to a stranger was a general idea of homeliness and comfort. It was not fine, it was not æsthetic, it was not even elegant. A great bay window opened upon the garden, a large old-fashioned fireplace with carved wooden chimney-piece faced the bay. The floor was polished oak, with only an island of faded Persian carpet in the centre, and Indian prayer rugs lying about here and there. There were chairs and tables of richly carved Bombay blackwood, Japanese cabinets in the recesses beside the fire-place, a five-leaved Indian screen between the fire-place and the door. There was just enough Oriental china to give colour to the room, and to relieve by glowing reds and vivid purples the faded dead-leaf tint of curtains and chair covers.

The gong began to boom as the two girls came

into the room, and the rest of the family dropped in through the open windows at the same moment, Aunt Betsy bringing up the rear. There was no nursery dinner at The Knoll. Colonel Wendover allowed his children to dine with him from the day they were able to manage their knives and forks. Save on state occasions, the whole brood sat down with their father and mother to the seven o'clock dinner; as the young sprigs of the House of Orleans used to sit round good King Louis Philippe in his tranquil retirement at Claremont. Even the lisping girl who loved pigs had her place at the board, and knew how to behave herself. There was a subdued struggle for the seat next Ida, whom the Colonel had placed on his right, but Reginald, the elder of the Winchester boys, asserted his claim with a quiet firmness that proved irresistible. Grace was said with solemn brevity by the Colonel, whose sum total of orthodoxy was comprised in that brief grace, and in regular attendance at church on Sunday mornings; and then there came a period of chatter and laughter which might have been a little distracting

to a stranger. Each of the boys and girls had some wonderful fact, usually about his or her favourite animal, to communicate to the father. Aunt Betsy broke in with her fine manly voice at every turn in the conversation. Ripples of laughter made a running accompaniment to everything. It was a new thing to Ida Palliser to find herself in the midst of so much happiness.

After dinner they all rushed off to play lawn tennis, carrying Ida along with them.

'It's a shame,' protested Bessy. 'I know you're tired, darling. Come and rest in a shady corner of the drawing-room.'

This sounded tempting, but it was not to be.

'No she's not,' asserted Blanche boldly. 'You're not tired, are you, Miss Palliser?'

'Not too tired for just one game,' replied Ida. 'But you are never to call me Miss Palliser.'

'May I really call you Ida? That's too lovely.'

'May we all call you Ida?' asked Horatio. 'Don't begin by making distinctions. Blanche is no better than the rest of us.'

'Don't be jealous,' said Miss Palliser, laughing, 'I am going to be everybody's Ida.'

On this she was borne off to the garden as in a whirlwind.

There were some bamboo chairs and sofas on the grass in front of the bay window, and here the elder members of the family established themselves.

'I like that schoolfellow of Bessie's,' said Aunt Betsy, with her decided air, whereupon the Colonel and his wife assented, as they always did to any proposition of Miss Wendover's.

'She is remarkably handsome,' said the Colonel.

'She is good and thorough, and that's of much more consequence,' said his sister.

'She takes to the children, and that is so truly nice in her,' murmured Mrs. Wendover.

CHAPTER IV.

WENDOVER ABBEY.

THE next day was fine. The children had all been praying for fine weather, that they might entertain Miss Palliser with an exploration of the surrounding neighbourhood. Loud whoops of triumph and sundry breakdown dances were heard in the top story soon after five o'clock, for the juvenile Wendovers were early risers, and when in high spirits made themselves distinctly audible.

The eight o'clock breakfast in the old painted dining-room—all oak panelling, but painted stone colour by generations of Goths and Vandals—was even more animated than the seven o'clock dinner.

Such a breakfast, after the thick bread and butter and thin coffee at Mauleverer. Relays of hot buttered cakes and eggs and bacon, fish, honey, fresh fruit from the garden, a picturesque con-

fusion of form and colour on the lavishly-furnished table, and youthful appetites ready to do justice to the good cheer.

'What are you going to do with Miss Palliser?' asked the Colonel. 'Am I to take her for a drive?'

'No, father, you can't have Miss Palliser to-day. She's going in the jaunting-car,' said Reginald, talking of the lady as if she were a horse. 'We're going to take her over to the Abbey.'

The Abbey was the ancestral home of the Wendovers, now in possession of Brian Wendover, only son of the Colonel's eldest brother, and head of the house.

'Well, don't upset her oftener than you can help,' replied the father. 'I suppose you don't much mind being spilt off an outside car, Miss Palliser? I believe young ladies of your age rather relish the excitement.'

'She needn't be afraid,' said Reginald; 'I am going to drive.'

"Then we are very likely to find ourselves

reposing in a ditch before the day is over,' retorted Bessie. 'I hope you—or the pony—will choose a dry one.'

'I'll risk it, ditches and all,' said Ida, good-naturedly. 'I am longing to see the Abbey.'

'The rich Brian's Abbey,' said Bessie, laughing. "What a pity he is not at home for you to see him too! Do you think Brian will be back before Ida's holidays are over, father?'

'I never know what that young man is going to do,' answered the Colonel. 'When last I heard from him he was fishing in Norway. He doesn't care much about the sport, he tells me; indeed, he was never a very enthusiastic angler; but he likes the country and the people. He ought to stay at home, and stand for the county at the next election. A young man in his position has no business to be idle.'

'Is he clever?' asked Ida.

'Too clever for my money,' answered the Colonel. 'He has too much book-learning, and too little knowledge of men and things. What is the good of a man being a fine Greek scholar if he

knows nothing about the land he owns, or the cattle that graze upon it, and has not enough tact to make himself popular in his own neighbourhood? Brian is a man who would starve if his bread depended on his own exertions.'

'He's a jolly kind of cousin for a fellow to have,' suggested Horry, looking up from his eggs and bacon. "He lets us do what we like at the Abbey. By the way, Blanche, have you packed the picnic basket?'

'Yes.'

'What have you put in?'

'That's my secret,' answered Blanche. 'Do you think I am going to tell you what you are to have for lunch? That would spoil all the fun.

'Blanche isn't half a bad caterer,' said Reg. 'I place myself in her hands unreservedly; I will only venture to hint that I hope she hasn't forgotten the chutnee, Tirhoot, and plenty of it. What's the good of having a father who was shoulder to shoulder with Gough in the Punjab, if we are to run short of Indian condiments?'

At nine o'clock the young people were all

ready to start. The jaunting-car held five, including the driver; Bessie and her friend were to occupy one side, Eva, the round child who loved pigs, was to have a seat, and a place was to be kept for Miss Rylance, who was to be invited to join the exploration party, much to the disgust of the Winchester lads, who denounced her as a stuck-up minx, and distinguished her with various other epithets of an abusive character selected from a vocabulary known only to Wykamites. Blanche and Horatio and a smaller boy, called Ernest, who was dressed like a gillie, and had all the wildness of a young Highlander, were to walk, with the occasional charity of a lift.

The jaunting-car was drawn by a large white pony, fat and pampered, overfed with dainties from the children's tables, and petted and played with until he had become almost human in his intelligence, and a match for his youthful masters in cunning and mischief. This impish animal had been christened Robin Goodfellow, a name that was shortened for convenience to Robin. Robin's eagerness to depart was now made known

to the family by an incessant rattling of his bit.

Reginald took the reins, and got into his seat with the quiet grandeur of a celebrity in the four in-hand club. Ida and Bessie were handed to their places by Horatio, the chubby Eva scrambled into her seat, with a liberal display of Oxford blue stocking, under the shortest of striped petticoats; and off they drove to the cottage, Dr. Rylance's miniature dwelling, where the plate-glass windows were shining in the morning sun, and the colours of the flower-beds were almost too bright to be looked at.

Bessie found Miss Rylance in the dainty little drawing-room, all ebonised wood and blue china, as neat as an interior by Mieris. The fair Urania was yawning over a book of travels—trying to improve a mind which was not naturally fertile—and she was not sorry to be interrupted by an irruption of noisy Wendovers, even though they left impressions of their boots on the delicate tones of the carpet, and made havoc of the cretonne chair-covers.

Miss Rylance had no passion for country life. Fields and trees, hills and winding streams, even when enlivened by the society of the lower animals, were not all sufficient for her happiness. It was all very well for her father to oscillate between Cavandish Square and Kingthorpe, avoiding the expense and trouble of autumn touring, and taking his rest and his pleasure in this rustic retreat. But her summer holidays for the last three years had been all Kingthorpe, and Miss Rylance detested the picturesque village, the busy duck-pond, the insignificant hills, which nobody had ever heard of, and the monotonous sequence of events.

'We are going to the Abbey for a nice long day, taking our dinner with us, and coming round to Aunt Betsy's to tea on our way home,' said Bessie, as if she were proposing an entirely novel excursion; 'and we want you to come with us, Ranie.'

Miss Rylance stifled a yawn. She had been trying to pin her thoughts to a particular tribe of Abyssinians, who fought all the surrounding

tribes, and always welcomed the confiding stranger with a shower of poisoned arrows. She did not care for the Wendover children, but they were better than those wearisome Abyssinians.

'You are very kind, but I know the Abbey so well,' she said, determined to yield her consent as a favour.

'Never mind that. Ida has never seen it. We are going to show her everything. We want her to feel one of us.'

'We shall have a jolly lunch,' interjected Blanche. 'There are some lemon cheesecakes that I made myself yesterday afternoon. Cook was in a good temper, and let me do it.'

'I hope you washed your hands first,' said Horatio. 'I'd sooner cook had made the cheesecakes.'

'Of course I washed my hands, you too suggestive pig. But I should hope that in a general way my hands are cleaner than cook's. It is only schoolboys who luxuriate in dirt.'

'You'll come, Ranie?' pleaded Bess.

'If you really wish it.'

'I do, or I shouldn't be here. But I hope you wish it too. You ought to be longing to get out of doors on such a lovely morning. Houses were never intended for such weather as this. Come and join the birds and butterflies, and all the happiest things in creation.'

'I must go for my hat and sunshade. I wasn't born full-dressed, like the birds and butterflies,' replied Urania.

She ran away, leaving Bessie and Ida in the drawing-room. The younger children, having rushed in and left their mark upon the room, had now rushed out again to the jaunting-car.

'A pretty drawing-room, isn't it?' asked Bess. 'It looks so neat and fresh and bright, after ours.'

'It doesn't look half so much like home,' said Ida.

'Perhaps not. But I believe it is just the exact thing a drawing-room ought to be in this latter part of the nineteenth century; or, at least, so Dr. Rylance says. How do you like the blue china? Dr. Rylance is an amateur of blue china. He will have no other. Dresden

and Sèvres have no existence for him. He recognizes nothing beyond his own particular breed of ginger-jars.'

Miss Rylance came back, dressed as carefully as if she had been going for a morning lounge in Hyde Park, hat and feather, pongee sunshade, mousquetaire gloves. The Wendovers all wore their gloves in the pockets, and cultivated blisters on the palms of their hands, as a mark of distinction, which implied great feats in rowing, or the pulling in of desperate horses.

Now they were all mounted on the car, just as the church clock struck ten. Reginald gave the reins a shake, cracked his whip, and Robin, who always knew where his young friends wanted to go, twisted the vehicle sharply round a corner and started at an agreeable canter, expressive of good spirits.

Robin carried them joltingly along a lovely lane till they came to a gentle acclivity, by which time, having given vent to his exuberance, the pony settled down into a crawl. Vainly did Reginald crack his whip—vain even stinging

switches on Robin's fat sides. Out of that crawl nothing could move him. The sun was gaining power with every moment, and blazing down upon the occupants of the car; but Robin cared not at all. He was an animal of tropical origin, and had no apprehension of sunshine; his eyes were so constructed as to accommodate themselves to a superfluity of light.

'I think we shall be tolerably well roasted by the time we get to the Abbey,' said Bessie. 'Don't you think if we were all to get down and push the back of the car, Robin might go a little faster?'

'He'll go fast enough when he has blown a bit,' said Reg. 'Can't you admire the landscape?'

'We could, if we were not being baked,' replied Ida.

Miss Rylance sat silent under her pongee umbrella, and wished herself in Cavendish Square; even though western London were as empty and barren as the great wilderness.

They were on the ridge of a hill, overlooking undulating pastures and quiet sheep-walks, fair

hills on which the yew-trees cast their dark shadows, a broad stretch of pastoral country with sunny gleams of water shining low in the distance.

Suddenly the road dipped, and Robin was going downhill with alarming speed.

'This means that we shall all be in the ditch presently,' said Bessie. 'Never mind. It's only a dry bed of dock and used-up stinging nettles. We shan't be much hurt.'

After two or three miraculous escapes they landed at the bottom of the hill, and Ida beheld the good old gates of Kingthorpe Abbey, low iron gates that stood open, between tall stone pillars supporting the sculptured escutcheon of the Wendovers. There was a stone lodge on each side of the gate, past which the car drove in triumph into an avenue of ancient yew-trees, low and wide-spreading, with a solemn gloom that would better have become a churchyard than a gentleman's park.

It was a noble old park, richly timbered with oaks as old as those immemorial trees that make

the glory of Stoneleigh. There was a lake in a wooded hollow in front of the Abbey, a long low pile of stone, the newest part of which was as old as the days of the last Tudor. Nor had much money been spent on the restoration or decorative repair of that fine old house. It had been kept wind and weather proof. It had been protected against the injuries of time; and that was all. There it stood, a brave and solid monument of the remote past, grand in its stern simplicity and its historic associations.

'Oh, what a dear old house!' cried Ida, clasping her hands, as the car came out of the yew-tree avenue into the open space in front of the Abbey; a wide lawn, where four mighty cedars of Lebanon spread their dense shadows—grave old trees—which were in somewise impostors, as they looked older than the house, and yet had been saplings in the days of Queen Anne. 'What a sweet old place!' repeated Ida; 'and how I envy the rich Brian!'

'Don't you think the rich Brian's wife will be still more enviable?' sneered Miss Rylance.

'That depends. She may be a Vere-de-Vere-ish kind of person, and pine amongst her halls and towers,' said Ida.

'Not if she had been brought up in poverty. She would revel in the advantages of her position as Mrs. Wendover of the Abbey,' asserted Miss Rylance.

'Would she? The Earl of Burleigh's wife had been poor, and yet did not enjoy being rich and great,' said Bessie. 'It killed her, poor thing. And yet she had married for love, and had no remorse of conscience to weigh her down.'

'She was a sensitive little fool,' said Ida; 'I have no patience with her.'

'Modern young ladies are not easily crushed,' remarked Miss Rylance; 'they make marrying for money a profession.'

'Is that your idea of life?' asked Ida.

'No; but I understand it is yours. I heard you say you meant to marry for money.'

'Then you must have been listening to a conversation in which you had no concern,' Ida answered coolly. 'I never said as much to you.'

The three girls, and the chubby Eva, had alighted from the car, which was being conveyed to the stables at a hand-gallop, and this conversation was continued on the broad gravel sweep in front of the Abbey. Just as the discussion was intensifying in unpleasantness, the arrival of the pedestrians made an agreeable diversion. Blanche and her two brothers had come by a short cut, across fields and common, had given chase to butterflies, experimented with tadpoles, and looked for hedge-bird's eggs in the course of their journey, and were altogether in a state of dilapidation—perspiration running down their sunburnt faces—their hats anyhow—their hands embellished with recent scratches—their boots coated with clay.

'Did ever anyone see such objects?' exclaimed Bessie, who had imbibed certain conventional ideas of decency at Mauleverer Manor: 'you ought to be ashamed of yourselves.'

'I daresay we ought, but we aren't,' retorted Horatio. 'I found a tadpole in an advanced stage of transmutation, Miss Palliser, and it has almost

converted me to Darwinism. Given a single step and you may accept the whole ladder. If from tadpoles frogs, why not from monkeys man?'

'Go and be a Darwinite, and don't prose,' said Blanche, impatiently. 'We are going to show Ida the Abbey. How do you like the outside, darling?' asked the too-affectionate girl, favouring Miss Palliser with the full weight of her seven stone and three-quarters.

'I adore it. It is like a page out of an old chronicle.'

'Isn't it?' gasped Blanche; 'and you can fancy the fat old monks sitting on those stone benches, nodding in the sunshine. The house is hardly altered a bit since it was an actual abbey, except that half a dozen cells have been knocked into one comfortable bed-room. The long dark passages are just the same as they were when those sly old monks went gliding up and down them—such dear old passages, smelling palpably of ghosts.'

'Mice,' said Horatio.

'No, sir, ghosts. Do you suppose my sense

of smell is of such inferior quality that I can't distinguish a ghost from a mouse?'

'Now, how about luncheon?' demanded Horatio. 'I propose that we all go and sit under that prime old cedar and discuss the contents of the picnic basket before we discuss the Abbey.'

'Why, it isn't half-past eleven,' said Bessie.

'Ah,' sighed Blanche, 'I'm afraid it's too early for lunch. We should have nothing left to look forward to all the rest of the day.'

'There'd be afternoon tea at Aunt Betsy's to build upon,' said Horry. 'I gave her to understand we were to have something good: blue gages from the south wall, cream to a reckless extent.'

'Strawberry jam and pound-cake,' suggested Eva.

'If you go on like that you'll make me distracted with hunger,' said Blanche, a young person who at the seaside wanted twopence to buy buns directly after she had swallowed her dinner.

Bessie and Miss Rylance had been walking up and down the velvet sward beside the beds of dwarf

roses and geraniums, with a ladylike stateliness which did credit to their training at Mauleverer. Ida was the centre of the juvenile group.

'Come and see the Abbey,' exclaimed Horry, putting his arm through Miss Palliser's, 'and at the stroke of one we will sit down to lunch under the biggest of the cedars—the tree which according to tradition was planted by John Evelyn himself, when he came on a visit to Sir Tristram Wendover.'

They all trooped into the Abbey, the hall door standing open, as in a fairy tale. Bessie and Urania followed at a more sober pace; but Ida had given herself over to the children, and they did what they liked with her, Blanche hanging on her bodily all the time.

They were now joined by Reginald, who appeared mysteriously from the back premises, where he had been seeing Robin eat his corn, having a fixed idea that it was in the nature of all grooms and stablemen to cheat horses.

The Abbey was furnished with a sober grandeur, in perfect tone with its architecture. Everything

was solid and ponderous, save here and there, where in some lady's bower there appeared the spindle-legged tables and inlaid cabinets of the Chippendale period, which had an air of newness where all else was so old. The upper rooms were low and somewhat dark, the heavily mullioned windows being designed to exclude rather than to admit light. There was much tapestry, subdued in hue, but in good condition, and as frankly uninteresting in subject as the generality of old English needlework.

Below, the rooms were large and lofty, rich in carved chimney-pieces, well preserved panelling, and old oak furniture. There were some fine pictures, from Holbein downwards, and the usual array of family portraits, which the boys and girls explained and commented upon copiously.

'There's my favourite ancestor, Sir Tristram,' cried Blanche pointing to a dark-eyed cavalier, with strongly-marked brow and bronzed visage. 'He was middle-aged when that picture was painted, but I know he was handsome in his youth. The face is still in the family.'

'Of course it is,' said Horatio—'on my shoulders.'

'Your shoulders!' ejaculated Blanche, contemptuously. 'As if my Sir Tristram ever resembled you. He fought in all the great battles, from Edgehill to Worcester,' continued the girl; 'and he was wounded seven times: and he was true to his master through every trial; and he had all the Wendover plate melted down; and he followed Charles the Second into exile; he mortgaged his estate to raise money for the King; and he married a very lovely French woman, who introduced turned-up noses into the family,' concluded Blanche, giving her tip-tilted nose a complacent toss.

'I thought it was a mercy that we were spared the old housekeeper,' said Urania, 'but really Blanche is worse.'

'Ida doesn't know all about our family, if you do,' protested Blanche. 'It is all new to her.'

'Yes, dear, it is all new and interesting to me,' said Ida.

'How much more deeply you would have been

interested if Mr. Wendover had been here to expatiate upon his family tree,' said Urania.

'That might have made it still more interesting,' admitted Ida, with a frankness which took the sting out of Miss Rylance's remark.

The young Wendovers had shown Ida everything. They had opened cabinets, peered into secret drawers, sniffed at the stale *pot-pourri* in old crackle vases: they had dragged their willing victim through all the long slippery passages, by all the mysterious stairs and by-ways; they had obliged her to look at the interior of ghostly closets, where the ladies of old had stored their house linen or hung their mantuas and farthingales; they had made her look out of numerous windows to admire the prospect; they had introduced her to the state bedroom in which the heads of the Wendover race made a point of being born; they made her peep shuddering into the death-chamber where the family were laid in their last slumber. The time thus pleasantly occupied slipped away unawares; and the chapel clock was striking one as they all went trooping down the broad oak staircase for about the fifteenth time.

A gentleman was entering the hall as they came down. They could only see the top of his hat.

'It's father,' cried Eva.

'You little idiot, did you ever see my father in a stove-pipe hat on a week-day?' cried Reg., with infinite scorn.

'Then it's Brian.'

'Brian is in Norway.'

The gentleman looked up and greeted them all with a comprehensive smile. It was Dr. Rylance.

'So glad I have found you, young people,' he said blandly.

'Papa,' exclaimed Urania, in a tone which did not express unmitigated pleasure, 'this is a surprise. You told me you would not be down till late in the evening.'

'Yes, my dear: but the fine morning tempted me. I found my engagements would stand over till Monday or Tuesday, so I put myself into the eight o'clock train, and arrived at The Cottage just an hour after you and your friends had left

for your picnic. So I walked over to join you. I hope I am not in the way.'

'Of course not,' said Bessie. 'I'm afraid you'll find us hardly the kind of company you are accustomed to; but if you will put up with our roughness and noise we shall feel honoured.'

'We are going to get lunch ready,' said Blanche. 'You grown-ups will find us under Evelyn's tree when you're hungry, and you'd better accommodate yourselves to be hungry soon.'

'Or you may find a dearth of provisions, interjected Reg. 'I feel in a demolishing humour.'

The troop rushed off, leaving the three elder girls and Dr. Rylance standing in the hall, listlessly contemplative of Sir Tristram's dinted breast-plate, hacked by Roundhead pikes at Marston Moor.

CHAPTER V.

DR. RYLANCE ASSERTS HIMSELF.

THE luncheon under Evelyn's tree took a cooler shade from Dr. Rylance's presence than from the far-reaching branches of the cedar. His politeness made the whole business different from what it would have been without him.

Blanche and the boys, accustomed to abandon themselves to frantic joviality at any outdoor feast of their own contriving, now withdrew into the background, and established themselves behind the trunk of the tree, in which retirement they kept up an insane giggling, varied by low and secret discourse, and from which shelter they issued forth stealthily, one by one, to pounce with crafty hands upon the provisions. These unmannerly proceedings were ignored by the

elders, but they exercised a harassing influence upon poor little Eva, who had been told to sit quietly by Bessie, and who watched her brothers' raids with round-eyed wonder, and listened with envious ears to that distracting laughter behind the tree.

'Did you see Horry take quite half the cake, just now?' she whispered to Bessie, in the midst of a polite conversation about nothing particular.

And anon she murmured in horrified wonder, after a stolen peep behind the tree, 'Reg. is taking off Dr. Rylance.'

The grown-up luncheon party was not lively. Tongue and chicken, pigeon-pie, cheese-cakes, tarts, cake, fruit—all had been neatly spread upon a tablecloth laid on the soft turf. Nothing had been forgotten. There were plates and knives and forks enough for everybody—picnicking being a business thoroughly well understood at The Knoll; but there was a good deal wanting in the guests.

Ida was thoughtful, Urania obviously sullen, Bessie amiably stupid; but Dr. Rylance appeared

to think that they were all enjoying themselves intensely.

'Now this is what I call really delightful,' he said, as he poured out the sparkling Devonshire cider with as stately a turn of his wrist as if the liquor had been Cliquot or Roederer. 'An open-air luncheon on such a day as this is positively inspiring, and to a man who has breakfasted at seven o'clock, on a cup of tea and a morsel of dry toast—thanks, yes, I prefer the wing if no one else will have it—such an unceremonious meal is doubly welcome. I'm so glad I found you. Lucky, wasn't it, Ranie?'

He smiled at his daughter, as if deprecating that stolid expression of hers, which would have been eminently appropriate to the funeral of an indifferent acquaintance,—a total absence of all feeling, a grave nullity.

'I don't see anything lucky in so simple a fact,' answered Urania. 'You were told we had come here, and you came here after us.'

'You might have changed your minds at the last moment and gone somewhere else. Might you not, now, Miss Palliser?'

'Yes, if we had been very frivolous people; but as to-day's exploration of the Abbey was planned last night, it would have indicated great weakness of mind if we had been tempted into any other direction,' answered Ida, feeling somewhat sorry for Dr. Rylance.

The coldest heart might compassionate a man cursed in such a disagreeable daughter.

'I am very glad you were not weak-minded, and that I was so fortunate as to find you, said the doctor, addressing himself henceforward exclusively to Ida and her friend.

Bessie took care of his creature-comforts with a matronly hospitality which sat well upon her. She cut thin slices of tongue, she fished out savouriest bits of pigeon and egg, when he passed, by a natural transition, from chicken to pie. She was quite distressed because he did not care for tarts, or cake. But the doctor's appetite, unlike that of the young people on the other side of the cedar, had its limits. He had satisfied his hunger long before they had, and was ready to show Miss Palliser the gardens.

'They are fine old gardens,' he said, approvingly. 'Perhaps their chief beauty is that they have not a single modern improvement. They are as old-fashioned as the gardens of Sion Abbey, before the good queen Bess ousted the nuns to make room for the Percies.'

They all rose and walked slowly away from the cedar, leaving the fragments of the feast to Blanche and her three brothers. Eva stayed behind, to make one of that exuberant group, and to see Reg. 'take off' Urania and her father. His mimicry was cordially admired, though it was not always clear to his audience which was the doctor and which was his daughter. A stare, a strut, a toss, an affected drawl were the leading features of each characterization.

'I had no opportunity of congratulating you on your triumphs the other day, Miss Palliser,' said Dr. Rylance, who had somehow managed that Ida and he should be side by side, and a little in advance of the other two. 'But, believe me, I most heartily sympathized with you in the delight of your success.'

'Delight?' echoed Ida. 'Do you think there was any real pleasure for me in receiving a gift from the hands of Miss Pew, who has done all she could do to make me feel the disadvantages of my position, from the day I first entered her house to the day I last left it? The prizes gave me no pleasure. They have no value in my mind, except as an evidence that I have made the most of my opportunities at Mauleverer, in spite of my contempt for my schoolmistress.'

'You dislike her intensely, I see.'

'She has made me dislike her. I never knew unkindness till I knew her. I never felt the sting of poverty till she made me feel all its sharpness. I never knew that I was steeped in sinful pride until she humiliated me.'

'Your days of honour and happiness will come,' said the doctor, 'days when you will think no more of Miss Pew than of an insect which once stung you.'

'Thank you for the comforting forecast,' answered Ida, lightly. 'But it is easy to prophesy good fortune.'

'Easy, and safe, in such a case as yours. I can sympathize with you better than you may suppose, Miss Palliser. I have had to fight my battle. I was not always Dr. Rylance, of Cavendish Square; and I did not enter a world in which there was a fine estate waiting for me, like the owner of this place.'

'But you have conquered fortune, and by your own talents,' said Ida. 'That must be a proud thought.'

Dr. Rylance, who was not utterly without knowledge of himself, smiled at the compliment. He knew it was by tact and address, smooth speech and clean linen, that he had conquered fortune, rather than by shining abilities. Yet he valued himself not the less on that account. In his mind tact ranked higher than genius, since it was his own peculiar gift: just as blue ginger-jars were better than Sèvres, because he, Dr. Rylance, was a collector of ginger-jars. He approved of himself so completely that even his littlenesses were great in his own eyes.

'I have worked hard,' he said, complacently,

'and I have been patient. But now, when my work is done, and my place in the world fixed, I begin to find life somewhat barren. A man ought to reap some reward—something fairer and sweeter than pounds, shillings, and pence, for a life of labour and care.'

'No doubt,' asserted Ida, receiving this remark as abstract philosophy, rather than as having a personal meaning. 'But I think I should consider pounds, shillings, and pence a very fair reward, if I only had enough for them.'

'Yes, now, when you are smarting under the insolence of a purse-proud schoolmistress—but years hence, when you have won independence, you will feel disappointed if you have won nothing better.'

'What could be better?'

'Sympathetic companionship—a love worthy to influence your life.'

Ida looked up at the doctor with naïve surprise. Good heavens, was this middle-aged gentleman going to drop into sentiment, as Silas Wegg dropped into poetry? She glanced back at the other two. Happily they were close at hand,

'What have you done with the children, Bessie?' asked Ida, as if she were suddenly distracted with anxiety about their fate.

'Left them to their own devices. I hope they will not quite kill themselves. We are all to meet in the stable-yard at four, so that we may be with Aunt Betsy at five.'

'Don't you think papa and I had better walk gently home?' suggested Urania; 'I am sure it would be cruel to inflict such an immense party upon Miss Wendover.'

'Nonsense,' exclaimed Bessie. 'Why, if all old Pew's school was to march in upon her, without a moment's notice, Aunt Betsy would not be put out of the way one little bit. If Queen Victoria were to drop in unexpectedly to luncheon, my aunt would be as cool as one of her own early cucumbers, and would insist on showing the Queen her stables, and possibly her pigs.'

'How do you know that?' asked Ida.

'Because she never had a visitor yet whom she did not drag into her stables, from archbishops downwards; and I don't suppose she'd draw the

line at a queen,' answered Bessie, with conviction.

'I am going to drink tea with Miss Wendover, whatever Urania may do,' said Dr. Rylance, who felt that the time had come when he must assert himself. 'I am out for a day's pleasure, and I mean to drink the cup to the dregs.'

Urania looked at her father with absolute consternation. He was transformed; he had become a new person; he was forgetting himself in a ridiculous manner; letting down his dignity to an alarming extent. Dr. Rylance, the fashionable physician, the man whose nice touch adjusted the nerves of the aristocracy, to disport himself with unkempt, bare-handed young Wendovers! It was an upheaval of things which struck horror to Urania's soul. Easy, after beholding such a moral convulsion, to believe that the Wight had once been part of the mainland; or even that Ireland had originally been joined to Spain.

They all roamed into the rose-garden, where there were alleys of standard rose-trees, planted upon grass that was soft and springy under the

foot. They went into the old vineries, where the big bunches of grapes were purpling in the gentle heat. Dr. Rylance went everywhere, and he contrived always to be near Ida Palliser.

He did not again lapse into sentiment, and he made himself fairly agreeable, in his somewhat stilted fashion. Ida accepted his attention with a charming unconsciousness; but she was perfectly conscious of Urania's vexation, and that gave a zest to the whole thing.

'Well, Ida, what do you think of Kingthorpe Abbey?' asked Bessie, when they had seen everything, even to the stoats and weasles, and various vermin nailed flat against the stable wall, and were waiting for Robin to be harnessed.

'It is a noble old place. It is simply perfect. I wonder your cousin can live away from it.'

'Oh, Brian's chief delight is in roaming about the world. The Abbey is thrown away upon him. He ought to have been an explorer or a missionary. However, he is expected home in a month, and you will be able to judge for yourself whether he deserves to be master of this old

place. I only wish it belonged to the other Brian.'

'The other Brian is your favourite.'

'He is ever so much nicer than his cousin—at least, the children and I like him best. My father swears by the head of the house.'

'I think I would rather accept the Colonel's judgment than yours, Bess,' said Ida. 'You are so impulsive in your likings.'

'Don't say that I am wanting in judgment,' urged Bessie, coaxingly, 'for you know how dearly I love you. You will see the two Brians, I hope, before your holidays are over; and then you can make your own election. Brian Walford will be with us for my birthday picnic, I daresay, wherever he may be now. I believe he is mooning away his time in Herefordshire, with his mother's people.'

'Is his father dead?'

'Yes, mother and father both, ages ago, in the days when I was a hard-hearted little wretch, and thought it a treat to go into mourning, and rather nice to be able to tell everybody, "Uncle Walford's

dead. He had a fit, and he never speaked any more." It was news, you know, and in a village that goes for something.'

After a lengthy discussion, and some squabbling, it was decided that the children were to have the benefit of the jaunting-car for the homeward journey, and that Dr. Rylance and the three young ladies were to walk, attended by Reginald, who insisted upon attaching himself to their service, volunteering to show them the very nearest way through a wood, and across a field, and over a common, and down a lane, which led straight to the gate of Aunt Betsy's orchard.

Urania wore fashionable boots, and considered walking exercise a superstition of medical men and old-fashioned people; yet she stoutly refused a seat in the car.

'No, thanks, Horatio, I know your pony too well. I'd rather trust myself upon my own feet.'

'There's more danger in your high heels than in my pony,' retorted Horatio. 'I shouldn't wonder if you dropped in for a sprained ankle before you got home.'

Urania risked the sprained ankle. She began to limp before she had emerged from the wood. She hobbled painfully along the rugged footpath between the yellow wheat. She was obliged to sit down and rest upon a furzy hillock on the common, good-natured Bess keeping her company, while Ida and Reginald were half a mile ahead with Dr. Rylance. Her delicate complexion was unbecomingly flushed by the time she and Bessie arrived wearily at the little gate opening into Miss Wendover's orchard.

There were only some iron hurdles between Aunt Betsy's orchard and the lawn before Aunt Betsy's drawing-room. The house was characteristic of the lady. It was a long red brick cottage, solid, substantial, roomy, eschewing ornament, but beautified in the eyes of most people by an air of supreme comfort, cleanliness, and general well-being. In all Kingthorpe there were no rooms so cool as Aunt Betsy's in summer—none so warm in winter. The cottage had originally been the homestead of a small grass-farm, which had been bequeathed to Betsy Wendover by her father,

familiarly known as the Old Squire, the chief landowner in that part of the country. With this farm of about two hundred and fifty acres of the most fertile pasture land in Hampshire and an income of seven hundred a year from consols, Miss Wendover found herself passing rich. She built a drawing-room with wide windows opening on to the lawn, and a bed-room with a covered balcony over the drawing-room. These additional rooms made the homestead all-sufficient for a lady of Aunt Betsy's simple habits. She was hospitality itself, receiving her friends in a large-hearted, gentlemanlike style, keeping open house for man and beast, proud of her wine, still prouder of her garden and greenhouses, proudest of her stables; fond of this life, and of her many comforts, yet without a particle of selfishness; ready to leave her cosy fireside at a moment's notice on the bitterest winter night, to go and nurse a sick child, or comfort a dying woman; religious without ostentation, charitable without weakness, stern to resent an injury, implacable against an insult.

A refreshing sight, yet not altogether a pleasant one for Miss Rylance, met the eyes of the two young ladies as they neared the little iron gate opening from the orchard to the lawn. A couple of tea-tables had been brought out upon the grass before the drawing-room window. The youngsters were busily engaged at one table, Blanche pouring out tea, while her brothers and small sister made havoc with cake and fruit, homemade bread and butter, and jams of various hues. At the other table, less lavishly but more elegantly furnished, sat Miss Wendover and Ida Palliser, with Dr. Rylance comfortably established in a Buckinghamshire wickerwork chair between them.

'Does not that look a picture of comfort!' exclaimed Bessie.

'My father seems to be making himself very comfortable,' said Urania.

She hobbled across the lawn, and sank exhausted into a low chair, near her parent.

'My poor child, how dilapidated you look after your walk,' said Dr. Rylance; 'Miss Palliser and I enjoyed it immensely.'

'I cannot boast of Miss Palliser's robust health,' retorted Urania contemptuously, as if good health were a sign of vulgarity. 'I had my neuralgia all last night.'

Whenever the course of events proved objectionable, Miss Rylance took refuge in a complaint which she called her neuralgia, indicating that it was a species of disorder peculiar to herself, and of a superior quality to everybody else's neuralgia.

'You should live in the open air, like my sunburnt young friends yonder,' said the doctor, with a glance at the table where the young Wendovers were stuffing themselves; 'I am sure they never complain of neuralgia.'

Urania looked daggers, but spoke none.

It was a wearisome afternoon for that injured young lady. Dr. Rylance dawdled over his tea, handed teacups and bread and butter, was assiduous with the sugar basin, devoted with the cream jug, talked and laughed with Miss Palliser, as if they had a world of ideas in common, and made himself altogether objectionable to his only child.

By-and-by, when there was a general adjournment to the greenhouses and stables, Urania contrived to slip her arm through her father's.

'I thought I told you that Miss Palliser was my favourite aversion, papa,' she said, tremulous with angry feeling.

'I have some faint idea that you did express yourself unfavourably about her,' answered the doctor, with his consulting-room urbanity, 'but I am at a loss to understand your antipathy. The girl is positively charming, as frank as the sunshine, and full of brains.'

'I know her. You do not,' said Urania tersely.

'My dear, it is the speciality of men in my profession to make rapid judgments.'

'Yes, and very often to make them wrong. I was never so much annoyed in my life. I consider your attention to that girl a deliberate insult to me; a girl with whom I never could get on—who has said the rudest things to me.'

'Can I be uncivil to a friend of your friend, Bessie?'

'There is a wide distance between being uncivil and being obsequiously, ridiculously attentive.'

'Urania,' said the doctor in his gravest voice, 'I have allowed you to have your own way in most things, and I believe your life has been a pleasant one.'

'Of course, papa. I never said otherwise.'

'Very well, my dear, then you must be good enough to let me take my own way of making life pleasant to myself, and you must not take upon yourself to dictate what degree of civility I am to show to Miss Palliser, or to any other lady.'

Urania held her peace after this. It was the first deliberate snub she had ever received from her father, and she added it to her lengthy score against Ida.

CHAPTER VI.

A BIRTHDAY FEAST.

IDA PALLISER'S holidays were coming to an end, like a tale that is told. There was only one day more left, but that day was to be especially glorious; for it was Bessie Wendover's birthday, a day which from time immemorial—or, at all events, ever since Bessie was ten years old—had been sacred to certain games or festivities—a modernised worship of the great god Pan.

Sad was it for Bessie and all the junior Wendovers when the seventh of September dawned with gray skies, or east winds, rain, or hail. It was usually a brilliant day. The clerk of the weather appeared favourably disposed to the warm-hearted Bessie.

On this particular occasion the preparations for the festival were on a grander scale than usual,

in honour of Ida, who was on the eve of departure. A cruel, cruel car was to carry her off to Winchester at six o'clock on the morning after the birthday; the railway station was to swallow her up alive; the train was to rush off with her, like a fiery dragon carrying off the princess of fairy tale; and the youthful Wendovers were to be left lamenting.

In six happy weeks their enthusiasm for their young guest had known no abatement. She had realized their fondest anticipations. She had entered into their young lives and made herself a part of them. She had given herself up, heart and soul, to childish things and foolish things, to please these devoted admirers; and the long summer holiday had been very sweet to her. The open-air life—the balmy noontides in woods and meadows, beside wandering trout streams—on the breezy hill-tops—the afternoon tea-drinking in gardens and orchards—the novels read aloud, seated in the heart of some fine old tree, with her auditors perched on the branches round about her, like gigantic birds—the boating excursions

on a river with more weeds than water in it—the jaunts to Winchester, and dreamy afternoons in the cathedral—all had been delicious. She had lived in an atmosphere of homely domestic love, among people who valued her for herself, and did not calculate the cost of her gowns, or despise her because she had so few. The old church was lovely in her eyes; the old vicar and his wife had taken a fancy to her. Everything at Kingthorpe was delightful, except Urania. She certainly was a drawback; but she had been tolerably civil since the first day at the Abbey.

Ida had spent many an hour at the Abbey since that first inspection. She knew every room in the house—the sunniest windows—the books in the long library, with its jutting wings between the windows, and cosy nooks for study. She knew almost every tree in the park, and the mild faces of the deer looking gravely reproachful, as if asking what business she had there. She had lain asleep on the sloping bank above the lake on drowsy afternoons, tired by wandering far a-field with her young esquires. She knew

the Abbey by heart—better than even Urania knew it; though she had used that phrase to express utter satiety. Ida Palliser had a deeper love of natural beauty, a stronger appreciation of all that made the old place interesting. She had a curious feeling, too, about the absent master of that grave, gray old house—a fond, romantic dream, which she would not for the wealth of India have revealed to mortal ear, that in the days to come Brian's life would be in somewise linked with hers. Perhaps this foolish thought was engendered of the blankness of her own life, a stage on which the players had been so few that this figure of an unknown young man assumed undue proportions.

Then, again, the fact that she could hear very little about Mr. Wendover from his cousins, stimulated her curiosity about him, and intensified her interest in him. Brian's merits were a subject which the Wendover children always shirked, or passed over so lightly that Ida was no wiser for her questioning; and maidenly reserve forbade her too eager inquiry.

About Brian Walford, the son of Parson Wendover, youngest of the three brothers, for seven years vicar of a parish near Hereford, and for the last twelve years at rest in the village churchyard, the young Wendovers had plenty to say. He was good-looking, they assured Ida. She would inevitably fall in love with him when they met. He was the cleverest young man in England, and was certain to finish his career as Lord Chancellor, depite the humility of his present stage of being.

'He has no fortune, I suppose?' hazarded Ida, in a conversation with Horatio.

She did not ask the question from any interest in the subject. Brian Walford was a being whose image never presented itself to her mind. She only made the remark for the sake of saying something.

'Not a denarius,' said Horry, who liked occasionally to be classical. 'But what of that? If I were as clever as Brian I shouldn't mind how poor I was. With his talents he is sure to get to the top of the tree.'

'What can he do?' asked Ida.

'Ride a bicycle better than any man I know.'

'What else?'

'Sing a first-rate comic song.'

'What else?'

'Get longer breaks at billiards than any fellow I ever played with.'

'What else?'

'Pick the winner out of a score of race-horses in the preliminary canter.'

'Those are great gifts, I have no doubt,' said Ida. 'But do eminent lawyers, in a general way, win their advancement by riding bicycles and singing comic songs?'

'Don't sneer, Ida. When a fellow is clever in one thing he is clever in other things. Genius is many-sided, universal. Carlyle says as much. If Napoleon Bonaparte had not been a great general, he would have been a great writer like Voltaire—or a great lawyer like Thurlow.'

From this time forward Ida had an image of Brian Walford in her mind. It was the picture of a vapid youth, fair-haired, with thin moustache

elaborately trained, and thinner whiskers—a fribble that gave half its little mind to its collar, and the other half to its boots. Such images are photographed in a flash of lightning on the sensitive brain of youth, and are naturally more often false guesses than true ones.

There was delightful riot in the house of the Wendovers on the night before the picnic. The Colonel had developed a cold and cough within the last week, so he and his wife had jogged off to Bournemouth, in the T-cart, with one portmanteau and one servant, leaving Bessie mistress of all things. It was a grief to Mrs. Wendover to be separated from home and children at any time, and she was especially regretful at being absent on her eldest daughter's birthday; but the Colonel was paramount. If his cough could be cured by sea air, to the sea he must go, with his faithful wife in attendance upon him.

'Don't let the children turn the house quite out of windows, darling,' said Mrs. Wendover, at the moment of parting.

'No, mother dear, we are all going to be goodness itself.'

I know, dears, you always are. And I hope you will all enjoy yourselves.'

'We're sure to do that, mother,' answered Reginald, with a cheerfulness that seemed almost heartless.

The departing parent would not have liked them to be unhappy, but a few natural tears would have been a pleasing tribute. Not a tear was shed. Even the little Eva skipped joyously on the door-step as the phaeton drove away. The idea of the picnic was all absorbing.

The Colonel and his wife were to spend a week at Bournemouth. Ida would see them no more this year.

'You must come again next summer,' Mrs. Wendover said heartily, as she kissed her daughter's friend.

'Of course she must,' cried Horry. 'She is coming every summer. She is one of the institutions of Kingthorpe. I only wonder how we ever managed to get on so long without her.'

All that evening was devoted to the packing of hampers, and to general skirmishing. The picnic

was to be held on the highest hill-top between Kingthorpe and Winchester, one of those little Lebanons, fair and green, on which the yew-trees flourished like the cedars of the East, but with a sturdy British air that was all their own.

The birthday dawned with the soft pearly gray and tender opal tints which presage a fair noontide. Before six o'clock the children had all besieged Bessie's door, with noisy tappings and louder congratulations. At seven, they were all seated at breakfast, the table strewn with birthday gifts, mostly of that useless and semi-idiotic character peculiar to such tributes—ormolu inkstands, holding a thimbleful of ink—penholders warranted to break before they have been used three times—purses with impossible snaps — photograph frames and pomatum-pots.

Bessie pretended to be enraptured with everything. The purse Horry gave her was 'too lovely.' Reginald's penholder was the very thing she had been wanting for an age. Dear little Eva's pomatum-pot was perfection. The point-lace handkerchief Ida had worked in secret was exquisite,

Blanche's crochet slippers were so lovely that their not being big enough was hardly a fault. They were much too pretty to be worn. Urania contributed a more costly gift, in the shape of a perfume cabinet, all cut-glass, walnut-wood, and ormolu.

'Urania's presents are always meant to crush one,' said Blanche, disrespectfully; 'they are like the shields and bracelets those rude soldiers flung at poor Tarpeia.'

Urania was to be one of the picnic party. She was to be the only stranger present. There had been a disappointment about the two cousins. Neither Brian had accepted the annual summons. One was supposed to be still in Norway, the other had neglected to answer the letter which had been sent more than a week ago to his address in Herefordshire.

'I'm afraid you'll find it dreadfully like our every-day picnics,' Bessie said to Ida, as they were starting.

'I shall be satisfied if it be half as pleasant.'

'Ah, it would have been nice enough if the two Brians had been with us. Brian Walford is so amusing.'

'He would have sung comic songs, I suppose?' said Ida, rather contemptuously.

'Oh, no; you must not suppose that he is always singing comic songs. He is one of those versatile people who can do anything.'

'I don't want to be rude about your own flesh and blood, Bess, but in a general way I detest versatile people,' said Ida.

'What a queer girl you are, Ida! I'm afraid you have taken a dislike to Brian Walford,' complained Bessie.

'No,' said Ida, deep in thought,—the two girls were standing at the hall-door, waiting for the carriage,—'it is not that.'

'You like the idea of the other Brian better?'

Ida's wild-rose bloom deepened to a rich carnation.

'Oh, Ida,' cried Bessie; 'do you remember what you said about marrying for money?'

'It was a revolting sentiment; but it was wrung from me by the infinite vexations of poverty.'

'Wouldn't it be too lovely if Brian the Great were to fall in love with you, and ask you to be mistress

of that dear old Abbey which you admire so much?'

'Don't be ecstatic, Bessie. I shall never be the mistress of the Abbey. I was not born under a propitious star. There must have been a very ugly concatenation of planets ruling the heavens at the hour of my birth. You see, Brian the Great does not even put himself in the way of falling captive to my charms.'

This was said half in sport, half in bitterness—indeed, there was a bitter flavour in much of Ida Palliser's mirth. She was thinking of the stories she had read in which a woman had but to be young and lovely, and all creation bowed down to her. Yet her beauty had been for the most part a cause of vexation, and had made people hate her. She had been infinitely happy during the last six weeks; but embodied hatred had been close at hand in the presence of Miss Rylance; and if anyone had fallen in love with her during that time, it was the wrong person.

The young ladies were to go in the landau, leaving he exclusive enjoyment of Robin's variable humours

to Horatio and the juveniles. There was a general idea that Robin, in conjunction with a hilly country, might be sooner or later fatal to the young Wendovers; but they went on driving him, nevertheless, as everybody knew that if he did ultimately prove disastrous to them it would be with the best intentions and without loss of temper.

Bessie and Ida took their seats in the roomy carriage, Reginald mounted to the perch beside the coachman, and they drove triumphantly through the village to the gate of Dr. Rylance's cottage, where Urania stood waiting for them.

'I hope we haven't kept you long?' said Bessie.

'Not more than a quarter of an hour,' answered Urania, meekly; 'but that seems rather long in a broiling sun. You always have such insufferably hot weather on your birthdays, Bessie.'

'It will be cool enough on the hills by-and-by,' said Bess, apologetically.

'I daresay there will be a cold wind,' returned Urania, who wore an unmistakable air of discontent. 'There generally is on these unnatural September days.'

'One would think you bore a grudge against the month of September because I was born in it,' retorted Bessie. And then, remembering her obligations, she hastened to add, 'How can I thank you sufficiently for that exquisite scent-case? It is far too lovely.'

'I am very glad you like it. One hardly knows what to choose.'

Miss Rylance had taken her seat in the landau by this time, and they were bowling along the smooth high road at that gentle jog-trot pace affected by a country gentleman's coachman.

The day was heavenly; the wind due south; a day on which life—mere sensual existence—is a delight. The landscape still wore its richest summer beauty—not a leaf had fallen. They were going upward, to the hilly region between Kingthorpe and Winchester, to a spot where there was a table-shaped edifice of stones, supposed to be of Druidic origin.

The young Wendovers were profoundly indifferent to the Druids, and to that hypothetical race who lived ages before the Druids, and have broken

out all over the earth in stony excrescences, as yet vaguely classified. That three-legged granite table, whose origin was lost in the remoteness of past time, seemed to the young Wendovers a thing that had been created expressly for their amusement, to be climbed upon or crawled under as the fancy moved them. It was a capital rallying-point for a picnic or a gipsy tea-drinking.

'We are to have no grown-ups to-day,' said Reginald, looking down from his place beside the coachman. 'The pater and mater are away, and Aunt Betsy has a headache; so we can have things all our own way.'

'You are mistaken, Reginald,' said Urania; 'my father is going to join us by-and-by. I hope he won't be considered an interloper. I told him that it was to be a young party, and that I was sure he would be in the way; but he wouldn't take my advice. He is going to ride over in the broiling sun. Very foolish, I think.'

'I thought Dr. Rylance was in London?'

'He was till last night. He came down on purpose to be at your picnic.'

'I am sure I feel honoured,' said Bessie.

'Do you? I don't think *you* are the attraction,' answered Urania, with a cantankerous glance at Miss Palliser.

Ida's dark eyes were looking far away across the hills. It seemed as if she neither heard Miss Rylance's speech nor saw the sneer which emphasized it.

Dr Rylance's substantial hunter came plodding over the turfy ridge behind them five minutes afterwards, and presently he was riding at a measured trot beside the carriage door, congratulating Bessie on the beauty of the day, and saying civil things to every one.

'I could not resist the temptation to give myself a day's idleness in the Hampshire air,' he said.

Reginald felt unutterably savage. What a trouble-feast the man was. They would have to adapt the proceedings of the day to his middle-aged good manners. There could be no wild revelry, no freedom. Dr. Rylance was an embodiment of propriety.

Half an hour after dinner they were all scattered upon the hills.

Reginald, who cherished a secret passion for Ida, which was considerably in advance of his years, and who had calculated upon being her guide, philosopher, and friend all through the day, found himself ousted by the West End physician, who took complete possession of Miss Palliser, under the pretence of explaining the history—altogether speculative—of the spot. He discoursed eloquently about the Druids, expatiated upon the City of Winchester, dozing in the sunshine yonder, among its fat water meadows. He talked of the Saxons and the Normans, of William of Wykeham, and his successors, until poor Ida felt sick and faint from very weariness. It was all very delightful talk, no doubt—the polished utterance of a man who read his *Saturday Review* and *Athenæum* diligently, saw an occasional number of *Fors Clavigera*, and even skimmed the more æsthetic papers in the *Architect;* but to Ida this expression of modern culture was all weariness. She would rather have been racing those wild young

Wendovers down the slippery hill-side, on which they were perilling their necks; she would rather have been lying beside the lake in Kingthorpe Park, reading her well-thumbed Tennyson, or her shabby little Keats.

Her thoughts had wandered ever so far away when she was called back to the work-a-day world by finding that Dr. Rylance's conversation had suddenly slipped from archæology into a more personal tone.

'Are you really going away to-morrow?' he asked.

'Yes,' answered Ida, sadly, looking at one of the last of the butterflies, whose brief summertide of existence was wearing to its close, like her own.

'You are going back to Mauleverer Manor?'

'Yes. I have another half-year of bondage. I am going back to drudgery and self-contempt, to be brow-beaten by Miss Pew, and looked down upon by most of her pupils. The girls in my own class are very fond of me, but I'm afraid their fondness is half pity. The grown-up

girls with happy homes and rich fathers despise me. I hardly wonder at it. Genteel poverty certainly is contemptible. There is nothing debasing in a smock-frock or a fustian jacket. The labourers I see about Kingthorpe have a glorious air of independence, and I daresay are as proud, in their way, as if they were dukes. But shabby finery—genteel gowns worn threadbare: there is a deep degradation in those.'

'Not for you,' answered Dr. Rylance, earnestly, with an admiring look in his blue-gray eyes. They were somewhat handsome eyes when they did not put on their cruel expression. 'Not for you. Nothing could degrade, nothing could exalt you. You are superior to the accident of your surroundings.'

'It's very kind of you to say that; but it's a fallacy, all the same,' said Ida. 'Do you think Napoleon at St. Helena, squabbling with Sir Hudson Lowe, is as dignified a figure as Napoleon at the Tuileries, in the zenith of his power? But I ought not to be grumbling at fate. I have been happy for six sunshiny weeks. If I

were to live to be a century old, I could never forget how good people at Kingthorpe have been to me. I will go back to my old slavery, and live upon the memory of that happiness.'

'Why should you go back to slavery?' asked Dr. Rylance, taking her hand in his and holding it with so strong a grasp that she could hardly have withdrawn it without violence. 'There is a home at Kingthorpe ready to receive you. If you have been happy there in the last few weeks, why not try if you can be happy there always? There is a house in Cavendish Square whose master would be proud to make you its mistress. Ida, we have seen very little of each other, and I may be precipitate in hazarding this offer; but I am as fond of you as if I had known you half a lifetime, and I believe that I could make your life happy.'

Ida Palliser's heart thrilled with a chill sense of horror and aversion. She had talked recklessly enough of her willingness to marry for money, and, lo! here was a prosperous man laying two handsomely furnished houses a her

feet — a man of gentlemanlike bearing, good-looking, well-informed, well-spoken, with no signs of age in his well-preserved face and figure; a man whom any woman, friendless, portionless, a mere waif upon earth's surface, at the mercy of all the winds that blow, ought proudly and gladly to accept for her husband.

No, too bold had been her challenge to fate. She had said that she would marry any honest man who would lift her out of the quagmire of poverty: but she was not prepared to accept Dr. Rylance's offer, generous as it sounded. She would rather go back to the old treadmill, and her old fights with Miss Pew, than reign supreme over the dainty cottage at Kingthorpe and the house in Cavendish Square. Her time had not come.

Dr. Rylance had not risen to eloquence in making his offer; and Ida's reply was in plainest words.

'I am very sorry,' she faltered. 'I feel that it is very good of you to make such a proposal; but I cannot accept it.'

'There is some one else,' said the doctor. 'Your heart is given away already.'

'No,' she answered sadly; 'my heart is like an empty sepulchre.'

'Then why should I not hope to win you? I have been hasty, no doubt: but I want if possible to prevent your return to that odious school. If you would but make me happy by saying yes, you could stay with your kind friends at The Knoll till the day that makes you mistress of my house. We might be married in time to spend November in Italy. It is the nicest month for Rome. You have never seen Italy, perhaps?'

'No. I have seen very little that is worth seeing.'

'Ida, why will you not say yes? Do you doubt that I should try my uttermost to make you happy?'

'No,' she answered gravely, 'but I doubt my own capacity for that kind of happiness.'

Dr. Rylance was deeply wounded. He had been petted and admired by women during the ten years of his widowhood, favoured and a favourite everywhere He had made up his mind deliberately to marry this

penniless girl. Looked at from a worldling's point of view, it would seem, at the first glance, an utterly disadvantageous alliance : but Dr. Rylance had an eye that could sweep over horizons other than are revealed to the average gaze, and he told himself that so lovely a woman as Ida Palliser must inevitably become the fashion in that particular society which Dr. Rylance most affected : and a wife famed for her beauty and elegance would assuredly be of more advantage to a fashionable physician than a common-place wife with a fortune. Dr. Rylance liked money ; but he liked it only for what it could buy. He had no sons, and he was much too fond of himself to lead laborious days in order to leave a large fortune to his daughter. He had bought a lease of his London house, which would last his time ; he had bought the freehold of the Kingthorpe cottage ; and he was living up to his income. When he died there would be two houses of furniture, plate, pictures, horses and carriages, and the Kingthorpe cottage, to be realized for Urania. He estimated these roughly as worth between six and seven thousand pounds, and he considered seven

thousand pounds an ample fortune for his only daughter. Urania was in happy ignorance of the modesty of his views. She imagined herself an heiress on a much larger scale.

To offer himself to a penniless girl, of whose belongings he knew absolutely nothing, and to be peremptorily refused! Dr. Rylance could hardly believe such a thing possible. The girl must be trifling with him, playing her fish, with the fixed intention of landing him presently. It was in the nature of girls to do that kind of thing. 'Why do you reject me?' he asked seriously; 'is it because I am old enough to be your father?'

'No, I would marry a man old enough to be my grandfather if I loved him,' answered Ida, with cruel candour.

'And I am to understand that your refusal is irrevocable?' he urged.

'Quite irrevocable. But I hope you believe that I am grateful for the honour you have done me.'

'That is the correct thing to say upon such occasions,' answered Dr. Rylance, coldly; 'I wonder the sentence is not written in your copybooks,

among those moral aphorisms which are of so little use in after life.'

'The phrase may seem conventional, but in my case it means much more than usual,' said Ida; 'a girl who has neither money nor friends has good reason to be grateful when a gentleman asks her to be his wife.'

'I wish I could be grateful for your gratitude,' said Dr. Rylance, 'but I can't. I want your love, and nothing else. Is it on Urania's account that you reject me?' he urged. 'If you think that she would be a hindrance to your happiness, pray dismiss the thought. If she did not accommodate herself pleasantly to my choice her life would have to be spent apart from us. I would brook no rebellion.'

The cruel look had come into Dr. Rylance's eyes. He was desperately angry. He was surprised, humiliated, indignant. Never had the possibility of rejection occurred to him. It had been for him to decide whether he would or would not take this girl for his wife; and after due consideration of her merits and all surrounding circumstances, he had decided that he would take her.

'Is my daughter the stumbling-block?' he urged.

'No,' she answered, 'there is no stumbling-block. I would marry you to-morrow, if I felt that I could love you as a wife ought to love her husband. I said once—only a little while ago—that I would marry for money. I find that I am not so base as I thought myself.'

'Perhaps the temptation is not large enough,' said Dr. Rylance. 'If I had been Brian Wendover, and the owner of Kingthorpe Abbey, you would hardly have rejected me so lightly.'

Ida crimsoned to the roots of her hair. The shaft went home. It was as if Dr. Rylance had been inside her mind and knew all the foolish day-dreams she had dreamed in the idle summer afternoons, under the spreading cedar-branches, or beside the lake in the Abbey grounds. Before she had time to express her resentment a cluster of young Wendovers came sweeping down the greensward at her side, and in the next minute Blanche was hanging upon her bodily, like a lusty parasite strangling a slim young tree.

'Darling,' cried Blanche gaspingly, 'such news.

Brian has come—cousin Brian—after all, though he thought he couldn't. But he made a great effort, and he has come all the way, as fast as he could tear, to be here on Bessie's birthday. Isn't it too jolly?'

'All the way from Norway?' asked Ida.

'Yes,' said Urania, who had been carried down the hill with the torrent of Wendovers, 'all the way from Norway. Isn't it nice of him?'

Blanche's frank face was brimming over with smiles. The boys were all laughing. How happy Brian's coming had made them!

Ida looked at them wonderingly.

'How pleased you all seem!' she said. 'I did not know you were so fond of your cousin. I thought it was the other you liked.'

'Oh, we like them both,' cried Blanche, 'and it is so nice of Brian to come on purpose for Bessie's birthday. Do come and see him. He is on the top of the hill, talking to Bess; and the kettle boils, and we are just going to have tea. We are all starving.'

'After such a dinner!' exclaimed Ida.

'Such a dinner, indeed!—two or three legs of fowls and a plate or so of pie!' ejaculated Reginald, contemptuously. 'I began to be hungry a quarter of an hour afterwards. Come and see Brian.'

Ida looked round her wonderingly, feeling as if she was in a dream.

Dr. Rylance had disappeared. Urania was smiling at her sweetly, more sweetly than it was her wont to smile at Ida Palliser.

'One would think she knew that I had refused her father,' mused Ida.

They all climbed the hill, the children talking perpetually, Ida unusually silent. The smoke of a gipsy fire was going up from a hollow near the Druid altar, and two figures were standing beside the altar; one, a young man, with his arm resting on the granite slab, and his head bent as he talked, with seeming earnestness, to Bessie Wendover. He turned as the crowd approached, and Bessie introduced him to Miss Palliser. 'My cousin Brian—my dearest friend Ida,' she said.

'She is desperately fond of the Abbey,' said Blanche; 'so I hope she will like you. "Love me,

love my dog," says the proverb, so I suppose one might say, "Love my house, love me."'

Ida stood silent amidst her loquacious friends, looking at the stranger with a touch of wonder. No, this was not the image which she had pictured to herself. Mr. Wendover was very good-looking—interesting even; he had the kind of face which women call nice—a pale complexion, dreamy gray eyes, thin lips, a well-shaped nose, a fairly intellectual forehead. But the Brian of her fancies was a man of firmer mould, larger features, a more resolute air, an eye with more fire, a brow marked by stronger lines. For some unknown reason she had fancied the master of the Abbey like that Sir Tristram Wendover who had been so loyal a subject and so brave a soldier, and before whose portrait she had so often lingered in dreamy contemplation.

'And you have really come all the way from Norway to be at Bessie's picnic?' she faltered at last, feeling that she was expected to say something.

"I would have come a longer distance for the sake of such a pleasant meeting,' he answered, smiling at her.

'Bessie,' cried Blanche, who had been grovelling on her knees before the gipsy fire, 'the kettle will go off the boil if you don't make tea instantly. If it were not your birthday I should make it myself.'

'You may,' said Bessie, 'although it is my birthday.'

She had walked a little way apart with Urania, and they two were talking somewhat earnestly.

'Those girls seem to be plotting something,' said Reginald; 'a charade for to-night, perhaps. It's sure to be stupid if Urania's in it.'

'You mean that it will be too clever,' said Horatio.

'Yes, that kind of cleverness which is the essence of stupidity.'

While Bessie and Miss Rylance conversed apart, and all the younger Wendovers devoted their energies to the preparation of a tremendous meal, Ida and Brian Wendover stood face to face upon the breezy hill-top, the girl sorely embarrassed, the young man gazing at her as if he had never seen anything so lovely in his life.

'I have heard so much about you from Bessie,' he said after a silence which seemed long to both. 'Her letters for the last twelve months have been a perpetual pæan—like one of the Homeric hymns with you for the heroine. I had quite a dread of meeting you, feeling that, after having my expectations strung up to such a pitch, I must be disappointed. Nothing human could justify Bessie's enthusiasm.'

'Please don't talk about it. Bessie's one weak point is her affection for me. I am very grateful. I love her dearly, but she does her best to make me ridiculous.'

'I am beginning to think Bessie a very sensible girl,' said Brian, longing to say much more; so deeply was he impressed by this goddess in a holland gown, with glorious eyes shining upon him under the shadow of a coarse straw hat.

'Have you come back to Hampshire for good?' asked Ida, as they strolled towards Bessie and Urania.

'For good? No, I never stay long.'

'What a pity that lovely old Abbey should be deserted!'

'Yes, it is rather a shame, is it not? But then no one could expect a young man to live there except in the hunting season—or for the sake of the shooting.'

'Could anyone ever grow tired of such a place?' asked Ida.

She was wondering at the young man's indifferent air, as if that solemn abbey, those romantic gardens, were of no account to him. She supposed that this was in the nature of things. A man born lord of such an elysium would set little value upon his paradise. Was it not Eve's weariness of Eden which inclined her ear to the serpent?

And now the banquet was spread upon the short smooth turf, and everybody was ordered to sit down. They made a merry circle, with the tea-kettle in the centre, piles of cake, and bread and butter, and jam-pots surrounding it. Blanche and Horatio were the chief officiators, and were tremendously busy ministering to the wants of others, while they satisfied their own hunger and thirst hurriedly between whiles. The damsel sat on the grass with a big crockery teapot in her lap, while her brother

watched and managed the kettle, and ran to and fro with cups and saucers. Bessie, as the guest of honour, was commanded to sit still and look on.

'Dreadfully babyish, isn't it?' said Urania, smiling with her superior air at Brian, who had helped himself to a crust of home-made bread, and a liberal supply of gooseberry jam.

'Uncommonly jolly,' he answered gaily. 'I confess to a weakness for bread and jam. I wish people always gave it at afternoon teas.'

'Has it not a slight flavour of the nursery?'

'Of course it has. But a nursery picnic is ever so much better than a swell garden-party, and bread and jam is a great deal more wholesome than salmon-mayonaise and Strasbourg pie. You may despise me as much as you like, Miss Rylance. I came here determined to enjoy myself.'

'That is the right spirit for a picnic,' said Ida. 'People with grand ideas are not wanted.'

'And I suppose in the evening you will join in the dumb charades, and play hide-and-seek in the garden, all among spiders and cockchafers.'

'I will do anything I am told to do,' answered

Brian, cheerily. 'But I think the season of the cockchafer is over.'

'What has become of Dr. Rylance?' asked Bessie, looking about her as if she had only that moment missed him.

'I think he went back to the farm for his horse,' said Urania. 'I suppose he found our juvenile sports rather depressing.'

'Well, he paid us a compliment in coming at all,' answered Bessie, 'so we must forgive him for getting tired of us.'

The drive home was very merry, albeit Bessie and her friend were to part next morning—Ida to go back to slavery. They were both young enough to be able to enjoy the present hour, even on the edge of darkness.

Bessie clasped her friend's hand as they sat side by side in the landau.

'You must come to us at Christmas,' she whispered: 'I shall ask mother to invite you.'

Brian was full of talk and gaiety as they drove home through the dusk. He was very different from that ideal Brian of Ida's girlish fancy—the

Brian who embodied all her favourite attributes, and had all the finest qualities of the hero of romance. But he was an agreeable, well-bred young man, bringing with him that knowledge of life and the active world, which made his talk seem new and enlightening after the strictly local and domestic intellects of the good people with whom she had been living.

With the family at The Knoll conversation had been bounded by Winchester on one side, and Romsey on the other. There was an agreeable freshness in the society of a young man who could talk of all that was newest in European art and literature, and who knew how the world was being governed.

But this fund of information was hinted at rather than expressed. To-night Mr. Wendover seemed most inclined to mere nonsense talk—the lively nothings that please children. Of himself and his Norwegian adventures he said hardly anything.

'I suppose when a man has travelled so much he gets to look upon strange countries as a matter of course,' speculated Ida. 'If I had just come from Norway, I should talk of nothing else.'

The dumb-charades and hide-and-seek were played, but only by the lower orders, as Bessie called her younger brothers and sisters.

Ida strolled in the moonlit garden with Mr. Wendover, Bessia, Urania, and Mr. Ratcliffe, a very juvenile curate, who was Bessie's admirer and slave. Urania had no particular admirer. She felt that every one at Kingthorpe must needs behold her with mute worship; but there was no one so audacious as to give expression to the feeling; no one of sufficient importance to be favoured with her smiles. She looked forward to her first season in London next year, and then she would be called upon to make her selection.

'She is worldly to the tips of her fingers,' said Ida, as she and Bessie talked apart from the others for a few minutes: 'I wonder she does not try to captivate your cousin.'

'What, Brian? Oh, he is not at all in her line. He would not suit her a bit.'

'But don't you think it would suit her to be mistress of the Abbey?'

Bessie gave a little start, as if the idea were new.

'I don't think she has ever thought of him in that light,' she said.

'Don't you? If she hasn't, she is not the girl I think her.'

'Oh, I know she is very worldly; but I don't think she's so bad as that.'

'Not so bad as to be capable of marrying for money—no, I suppose not,' said Ida, thoughtfully.

'I am sure you would not, darling,' said Bessie. 'You talked about it once, when you were feeling bitter; but I know that in your heart of hearts you never meant it. You are much too high-minded.'

'I am not a bit high-minded. All my high-mindedness—if I ever had any—has been squeezed out of me by poverty. My only idea is to escape from subjection and humiliation—a degrading bondage to vulgar-minded people.'

'But would the escape be worth having at the cost of your own degradation?' urged Bessie, who felt particularly heroic this evening, exalted by the moonlight, the loveliness of the garden, the thought of parting with her dearest friend. 'Marry for love,

dearest. Sacrifice everything in this world rather than be false to yourself.'

'You dear little enthusiast, I may never be asked to make any such sacrifice. I have not much chance of suitors at Mauleverer, as you know—and as for falling in love——'

'Oh, you never know when the fatal moment may come. How do you like Brian?'

'He is very gentlemanlike; he seems very well informed.'

'He is immensely clever,' answered Bessie, almost offended at this languid praise; 'he is a man who might succeed in any line he chose for himself. Do you think him handsome?'

'He is certainly nice looking.'

'How cool you are! I had set my heart upon your liking him.'

'What could come of my liking?' asked Ida, with a touch of bitterness. 'Is there a portionless girl in all England who would not like the master of Wendover Abbey?'

'But for his own sake,' urged Bessie, with a vexed air; 'surely he is worthy of being liked for his own sake, without a thought of the Abbey.'

'I cannot dissociate him from that lovely old house and gardens. Indeed, to my mind he rather belongs to the Abbey than the Abbey belongs to him. You see I knew the Abbey first.'

Here they were interrupted by Brian and Urania, and presently Ida found herself walking in the moonlight in a broad avenue of standard roses, at the end of the garden, with Mr. Wendover by her side, and the voices of the other three sounding ever so far away. On the other side of a low quickset hedge stretched a wide expanse of level meadow land, while in the farther distance rose the Wiltshire hills, and nearer the heathy highlands of the New Forest. The lamp-lit windows of Miss Wendover's cottage glimmered a little way off, across gardens and meadows.

'And so you are really going to leave us to-morrow morning?' said Brian regretfully.

'By the eight o'clock train from Winchester. To-morrow evening I shall be sitting on a form in a big bare class-room, listening to the babble of a lot of girls pretending to learn their lessons.'

'Are you fond of teaching?'

'Just imagine to yourself the one occupation which is most odious to you, and then you may know how fond I am of teaching; and of school-girls; and of school-life altogether.'

'It is very hard that you should have to pursue such an uncongenial career.'

'It seems so to me; but, perhaps, that is my selfishness. I suppose half the people in this world have to live by work they hate.'

'Allowing for the number of people to whom all kind of work is hateful, I daresay you are right. But I think, in a general way, congenial work means successful work. No man hates the profession that brings him fame and money; but the doctor without patients, the briefless barrister, can hardly love law or medicine.'

He beguiled Ida into talking of her own life, with all its bitterness. There was something in his voice and manner which tempted her to confide in him. He seemed thoroughly sympathetic.

'I keep forgetting what strangers we are,' she said, apologizing for her unreserve.

'We are not strangers. I have heard of you

from Bessie so much that I seem to have known you for years. I hope you will never think of me as a stranger.'

'I don't think I ever can, after this conversation. I'm afraid you will think me horribly egotistical.'

She had been talking of her father and step-mother, the little brother she loved so fondly, dwelling with delight upon his perfections.

'I think you all that is good and noble. How I wish this were not your last evening at The Knoll!'

'Do you think I do not wish it? Hark, there's Bessie calling us.'

They went back to the house, and to the drawing-room, which wore quite a festive appearance, in honour of Bessie's birthday; ever so many extra candles dotted about, and a table laid with fruit and sandwiches, cake and claret-cup, the children evidently considering a superfluity of meals indispensable to a happy birthday. Blanche and her juniors were sitting about the room, in the last stage of exhaustion after hide-and-seek.

'This has been a capital birthday,' said Horatio,

wiping the perspiration from his brow, and then filling for himself a bumper of claret-cup; 'and now we are going to dance. Blanche, give us the Faust waltz, and go on playing till we tell you to leave off.'

Blanche, considerably blown, and with her hair like a mop, sat down and began to touch the piano with resolute fingers and forcible rhythm. ONE, two, three, ONE, two, three. The boys pushed the furniture into the corners. Brian offered himself to Ida; Bessie insisted upon surrendering the curate to Urania, and took one of her brothers for a partner; and the three couples went gliding round the pretty old room, the cool night breezes blowing in upon them from wide-open windows.

They danced and played, and sang and talked, till midnight chimed from the old eight-day clock in the hall,—a sound which struck almost as much consternation to Bessie's soul as if she had been Cinderella at the royal ball.

'TWELVE O'CLOCK! and the little ones all up!' she exclaimed, looking round the circle of towzled heads with remorseful eyes. 'What

would mother say? And she told me she relied on my discretion! Go to bed, every one of you, this instant!'

'Oh, come now,' remonstrated Blanche, 'there's no use in hustling us off like that, after letting us sit up hours after our proper time. I'm going to have another sandwich; and there's not a bit of good in leaving all those raspberry tarts. The servants won't thank us. *They* have as many jam tarts as they like.'

'You greedy little wretches, you have been doing nothing but eat all day,' said Ida. 'When I am back at Mauleverer I shall remember you only as machines for the consumption of pudding and jam. Obey your grown-up sister, and go to bed directly.'

'Grown-up, indeed! How long has she been grown-up, I should like to know?' exclaimed Blanche vindictively. 'She's only an inch and a quarter taller than me, and she's a mere dumpling compared with Horry.'

The lower orders were got rid of somehow—driven to their quarters, as it were, at the point

of the bayonet; and then the grown-ups bade each other good night; the curate escorting Miss Rylance to her home, and Brian going up to the top floor to a bachelor's room.

'Who is going to drive Miss Palliser to the station?' he asked, as they stood, candlestick in hand, at the foot of the stairs.

'I am, of course,' answered Reginald. 'Robin will spin us over the hills in no time. I've ordered the car for seven sharp.'

There was very little sleep for either Bessie or her guest that night. Both girls were excited by memories of the day that was past, and by thoughts of the day that was coming. Ida was brooding a little upon her disappointment in Brian Wendover. He had very pleasant manners, he seemed soft-hearted and sympathetic, he was very good-looking—but he was not the Brian of her dreams. That ideal personage had never existed outside her imagination. It was a shock to her girlish fancy. There was a sense of loss in her mind.

'I must be very silly,' she told herself, 'to

make a fancy picture of a person, and to be vexed with him because he does not resemble my portrait.'

She was disappointed, and yet she was interested in this new acquaintance. He was the first really interesting young man she had ever met, and he was evidently interested in her. And then she pictured him at the Abbey, in the splendid solitude of those fine old rooms, leading the calm studious life which Bessie had talked of—an altogether enviable life, Ida thought.

Mr. Wendover was in the dining-room at half-past six when the two girls went down to breakfast. All the others came trooping down a few minutes afterwards, Reginald got up to the last degree of four-in-handishness which the resources of his wardrobe allowed, and with a flower in his buttonhole. There was a loud cry for eggs and bacon, kippered herrings, marmalade, Yorkshire cakes; but neither Ida nor Bessie could eat.

'Do have a good breakfast,' pleaded Blanche affectionately; 'you will be having bread and

scrape to-morrow. We have got a nice hamper for you, with a cake and a lot of jam puffs and things; but those will only last a short time.'

'You dear child, I wouldn't mind the bread and scrape if there were only a little love to flavour it,' answered Ida softly.

The jaunting-car came to the door as the clock struck seven. Ida's luggage was securely bestowed, then, after a perfect convulsion of kissing, she was handed to her place, Reginald jumped into his seat and took the reins, and Brian seated himself beside Ida.

'You are not going with them?' exclaimed Bessie.

'Yes, I am, to see that Miss Palliser is not spilt on the hills.'

'What rot!' cried Reginald. 'I should be rather sorry for myself if I were not able to manage Robin.'

'This is a new development in you, who are generally the laziest of living creatures,' said Bessie to Brian, and before he could reply, Robin was bounding cheerily through the village, making

very little account of the jaunting-car and its occupants. Urania was at her garden gate, fresh and elegant-looking in pale blue cambric. She smiled at Ida, and waved her a most gracious farewell.

'I don't think I ever saw Miss Rylance look so amiable,' said Ida. 'She does not often favour me with her smiles.'

'Are you enemies?' asked Brian.

'Not open foes; we have always maintained an armed neutrality. I don't like her, and she doesn't like me, and we both know it. But perhaps I ought not to be so candid. She may be a favourite of yours.'

'She might be, but she is not. She is very elegant, very lady-like—according to her own lights—very viperish.'

It was a lovely drive in the crisp clear air, across the breezy hills. Ida could not help enjoying the freshness of morning, the beauty of earth; albeit she was going from comfort to discomfort, from love to cold indifference or open enmity.

'How I delight in this landscape!' she exclaimed. 'Is it not ever so much better than Norway?' appealing to Brian.

'It is a milder, smaller kind of beauty,' he answered. 'Would you not like to see Norway?'

'I would like to see all that is lovely on earth; yet I think I could be content to spend a lifetime here. This must seem strange to you, who grow weary of that beautiful Abbey.'

'It is not of his house, but of himself, that a man grows weary,' answered Brian.

Robin was in a vivacious humour, and rattled the car across the hills at a good pace. They had a quarter of an hour to wait at the busy little station. Brian and Ida walked up and down the platform talking, while Reginald looked after the pony and the luggage. They found so much to say to each other, that the train seemed to come too soon.

They bade each other good-bye with a tender look on Brian's part, a blush on Ida's. Reginald had to push his cousin away from the carriage window, in order to get a word with the departing guest.

'We shall all miss you awfully,' he said; 'but mind, you must come back at Christmas.'

'I shall be only too glad, if Mrs. Wendover will have me. Good-bye.'

The train moved slowly forward, and she was gone.

'Isn't she a stunner?' asked Reginald of his cousin, as they stood on the platform looking at each other blankly.

'She is the handsomest girl I ever saw, and out and away the nicest,' answered Brian.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE RIVER-MEADOW.

The old hackneyed round of daily life at Mauleverer Manor seemed just a little worse to Ida Palliser after that happy break of six weeks' pure and perfect enjoyment. Miss Pew was no less exacting than of old. Miss Pillby, for whose orphaned and friendless existence there had been no such thing as a holiday, and who had spent the vacation at Mauleverer diligently employed in mending the house-linen, resented Ida's visit to The Knoll as if it were a personal injury, and vented her envy in sneers and innuendoes of the coarsest character.

'If *I* were to spoon upon one of the rich pupils, I dare say *I* could get invited out for the holidays,' she said, *apropos* to nothing particular; 'but I am thankful to say I am above such meanness.'

'I never laid myself under an obligation I didn't feel myself able to return,' said Miss Motley, the English governess, who had spent her holidays amidst the rank and fashion of Margate. 'When I go to the sea-side with my sister and her family, I pay my own expenses, and I feel I've a right to be made comfortable.'

Miss Pillby, who had flattered and toadied every well-to-do pupil, and laboured desperately to wind herself into the affections of Bessie Wendover, that warm-hearted young person seeming particularly accessible to flattery, felt herself absolutely injured by the kindness that had been lavished upon Ida. She drank in with greedy ears Miss Palliser's description of The Knoll and its occupants—the picnics, carpet-dances, afternoon teas; and the thought that all these enjoyments and festivities, the good things to eat and drink, the pleasant society, ought to have been hers instead of Ida's, was wormwood.

'When I think of my kindness to Bessie Wendover,' she said to Miss Motley, in the confidence of that one quiet hour which belonged to

the mistresses after the pupils' curfew-bell had rung youth and hope and gaiety into retirement, 'when I think of the mustard poultices I have put upon her chest, and the bronchial troches I have given her when she had the slightest touch of cold or cough, I am positively appalled at the ingratitude of the human race.'

'I don't think she likes bronchial troches,' said Miss Motley, a very matter-of-fact young person who saved money, wore thick boots, and was never unprovided with an umbrella; 'I have seen her throw them away directly after you gave them to her.'

'She ought to have liked them,' exclaimed Miss Pillby, sternly. 'They are very expensive.'

'No doubt she appreciated your kindness,' said Miss Motley, absently, being just then absorbed in an abstruse calculation as to how many yards of merino would be required for her winter gown.

'No, she did not,' said Miss Pillby. 'If she had been grateful she would have invited me to her home. I should not have gone, but the act would have given me a higher idea of her character.'

'Well, she is gone, and we needn't trouble ourselves any more about her,' retorted Miss Motley, who hated to be plagued about abstract questions, being a young woman of an essentially concrete nature, born to consume and digest three meals a day, and having no views that go beyond that function.

Miss Pillby sighed at finding herself in communion with so coarse a nature.

'I don't easily get over a blow of that sort,' she said, 'I am too tender-hearted.'

'So you are,' acquiesced Miss Motley. 'It doesn't pay in a big boarding-school, however it may answer in private families.'

Ida, having lost her chief friend and companion, Bessie Wendover, found life at Mauleverer Manor passing lonely. She even missed the excitement of her little skirmishes, her passages-at-arms, with Urania Rylance, in which she had generally got the best of the argument. There had been life and emotion in these touch-and-go speeches, covert sneers, quick retorts, innuendoes met and flung back in the very face of the sneerer. Now there was nothing but dull, dead monotony. Many of the

old pupils had departed, and many new pupils had come, daughters of well-to-do parents, prosperous, well-dressed, talking largely of the gaieties enjoyed by their elder sisters, of the wonderful things done by their brothers at Oxford or Cambridge, and of the grand things which were to happen two or three years hence, when they themselves should be 'out.' Ida took no interest in their prattle. It was so apt to sting her with the reminder of her own poverty, the life of drudgery and dependence that was to be her portion till the end of her days. She did not, in the Mauleverer phraseology, 'take to' the new girls. She left them to be courted by Miss Pillby, and petted by Miss Dulcibella. She felt as lonely as one who has outlived her generation.

Happily the younger girls in the class which she taught were fond of her, and when she wanted company she let these juveniles cluster round her in her garden rambles; but in a general way she preferred loneliness, and to work at the cracked old piano in the room where she slept. Beethoven and Chopin, Mozart and Mendelssohn were companions of whom she never grew weary.

So the slow days wore on till nearly the end of the month, and on one cool, misty, afternoon, when the river flowed sluggishly under a dull gray sky she walked alone along that allotted extent of the river-side path which the mistresses and pupil-teachers were allowed to promenade without *surveillance*. This river walk skirted a meadow which was in Miss Pew's occupation, and ranked as a part of the Mauleverer grounds, although it was divided by the high road from the garden proper.

A green paling, and a little green gate, always padlocked, secured this meadow from intrusion on the road-side, but it was open to the river. To be entrusted with the key of this pastoral retreat was a privilege only accorded to governesses and pupil-teachers.

It was supposed by Miss Pew that no young person in her employment would be capable of walking quite alone, where it was within the range of possibility that her solitude might be intruded upon by an unknown member of the opposite sex. She trusted, as she said afterwards, in the refined feeling of any person brought into

association with her, and, until rudely awakened by facts, she never would have stooped from the lofty pinnacle of her own purity to suspect the evil consequences which arose from the liberty too generously accorded to her dependents.

Ida detested Miss Pillby and despised Miss Motley; and the greatest relief she knew to the dismal monotony of her days was a lonely walk by the river, with a shabby Wordsworth or a battered little volume of Shelley's minor poems for her companions. She possessed so few books that it was only natural for her to read those she had until love ripened with familiarity.

On this autumnal afternoon she walked with slow steps, while the river went murmuring by and now and then a boat drifted lazily down the stream. The boating season was over for the most part—the season of picnics and beanfeasts, and cockney holiday-making, and noisy revelry, smart young women, young men in white flannels, with bare arms and sunburnt noses. It was the dull blank time when everybody who could afford to wander far from this suburban paradise, was away

upon his and her travels. Only parsons, doctors, schoolmistresses, and poverty stayed at home. Yet now and then a youth in boating costume glided by, his shoulders bending slowly to the lazy dip of his oars, his keel now and then making a rushing sound among long trailing weeds.

Such a youth presently came creeping along the bank, almost at Ida's feet, but passed her unseen. Her heavy lids were drooping, her eyes intent upon the familiar page. The young man looked up at her with keen gray eyes, recognised her, and pushed his boat in among the rushes by the bank, moored it to a pollard willow, and with light footstep leaped on shore.

He landed a few yards in the rear of Ida's slowly moving figure, followed softly, came close behind her, and read aloud across her shoulder.

> 'There was a Power in this sweet place,
> An Eve in this garden; a ruling grace
> Which to the flowers, did they waken or dream,
> Was as God is to the starry scheme.'

Ida looked round, first indignant, then laughing. 'How you startled me!' she exclaimed; 'I

thought you were some horrid, impertinent stranger; and yet the voice had a familiar sound. How are they all at The Knoll? It is nearly a fortnight since Bessie wrote to me. If she only knew how I hunger for her letters.'

'Very sweet of you,' answered Mr. Wendover, holding the girl's hand with a lingering pressure, releasing it reluctantly when her rising colour told him it would be insolent to keep it longer.

How those large dark eyes beamed with pleasure at seeing him! Was it for his own sake, or for love of her friends at Kingthorpe? The smile was perhaps too frank to be flattering.

'Very sweet of you to care so much for Bessie's girlish epistles,' he said lazily; 'they are full of affection, but the style of composition always recalls our dear Mrs. Nickleby "Aunt Betsy was asking after you the other day: and that reminds me that the last litter of black Hampshires was sixteen—the largest number father ever remembers having. The vicar and his wife are coming to dinner on Tuesday, and do tell me if this new picture that everybody is talking about

is really better than the Derby Day," and that sort of thing. Not a very consecutive style, don't you know.'

'Every word is interesting to me,' said Ida, with a look that told him she was not one of those young ladies who enjoy a little good-natured ridicule of their nearest and dearest. 'Is it long since you left Kingthorpe?'

'Not four-and-twenty hours. I promised Bessie that my very first occupation on coming to London should be to make my way down here to see you, in order that I may tell her faithfully and truly whether you are well and happy. She has a lurking conviction that you are unable to live without her, that you will incontinently go into a galloping consumption, and keep the fact concealed from all your friends until they receive a telegram summoning them to your death-bed. I know that is the picture Bessie's sentimental fancies have depicted.'

'I did not think Bessie was so morbid,' said Ida, laughing. 'No, I am not one of those whom the gods love. I am made of very tough material,

or I should hardly have lived till now. I see before me a perspective of lonely, loveless old age —finishing in a governess's almshouse. I hope there are almshouses for governesses.'

'Nobody will pity your loneliness or lovelessness,' retorted Brian, 'for they will both be your own fault.'

She blushed, looking dreamily across the dark-gray river to the level shores beyond—the low meadows—gentle hills in the back-ground—the wooded slopes of Weybridge and Chertsey. If this speaker, whose voice dropped to so tender a tone, had been like the Brian of her imaginings—if he had looked at her with the dark eyes of Sir Tristram's picture, how differently his speech would have affected her! As it was, she listened with airy indifference, only blushing girlishly at his compliment, and wondering a little if he really admired her—he the owner of that glorious old Abbey—the wealthy head of the house of Wendover —the golden fish for whom so many pretty fishers must have angled in days gone by.

'Did you stay at The Knoll all the time,' she

inquired, her thoughts having flown back to Kingthorpe; 'or at the Abbey?'

'At The Knoll. It is ever so much livelier, and my cousins like to have me with them.'

'Naturally. But I wonder you did not prefer living in that lovely old house of yours. To occupy it must seem like living in the middle ages.'

'Uncommonly. One is twelve miles from a station, and four from post-office, butcher, and baker. Very like the middle ages. There is no gas even in the offices, and there are as many rats behind the wainscot as there were Israelites in Egypt. All the rooms are draughty and some are damp. No servant who has not been born and bred on the estate will stay more than six months. There is a deficient water supply in dry summers, and there are three distinct ghosts all the year round. Extremely like the middle ages.'

'I would not mind ghosts, rats, anything, if it were my house,' exclaimed Ida, enthusiastically. 'The house is a poem.'

'Perhaps; but it is not a house; in the modern sense of the word, that is to say, which implies comfort and convenience.'

Ida sighed, deeply disgusted at this want of appreciation of the romantic spot where she had dreamed away more than one happy summer noontide, while the Wendover children played hide-and-seek in the overgrown old shrubberies.

No doubt life was always thus. The people to whom blind fortune gave such blessings were unable to appreciate them, and only the hungry outsiders could imagine the delight of possession.

'Are you living in London now?' she asked, as Mr. Wendover lingered at her side, and seemed to expect the conversation to be continued indefinitely.

His boat was safe enough, moving gently up and down among the rushes, with the gentle flow of the tide. Ida looked at it longingly, thinking how sweet it would be to step into it and let it carry her——any whither, so long as it was away from Mauleverer Manor.

'Yes, I am in London for the present.'

'But not for long, I suppose.'

'I hardly know. I have no plans. I won't say with Romeo that I am fortune's fool—but I am fortune's shuttlecock; and I suppose that means pretty much the same.'

'It was very kind of you to come to see me,' said Ida.

'Kind to myself, for in coming I indulged the dearest wish of my soul,' said the young man, looking at her with eyes whose meaning even her inexperience could not misread.

'Please don't pay me compliments,' she said, hastily, 'or I shall feel very sorry you came. And now I must hurry back to the house—the tea-bell will ring in a few minutes. Please tell Bessie I am very well, and only longing for one of her dear letters. Good-bye.'

She made him a little curtsey, and would have gone without shaking hands, but he caught her hand and detained her in spite of herself.

'Don't be angry,' he pleaded; 'don't look at me with such cold, proud eyes. Is it an offence to admire, to love you too quickly? If it is, I have sinned deeply, and am past hope of pardon. Must one serve an apprenticeship to mere formal acquaintance first, then rise step by step to privileged friendship, before one dares to utter the sweet word love? Remember, at least, that I am your dearest

friend's first cousin, and ought not to appear to you as a stranger.'

'I can remember nothing when you talk so wildly,' said Ida, crimson to the roots of her hair. Never before had a young lover talked to her of love. 'Pray let me go. Miss Pew will be angry if I am not at tea.'

'To think that such a creature as you should be under the control of any such harpy,' exclaimed Brian. 'Well, if I must go, at least tell me I am forgiven, and that I may exist upon the hope of seeing you again. I suppose if I were to come to the hall-door, and send in my card, I should not be allowed to see you?'

'Certainly not. Not if you were my own cousin instead of Bessie's. Good-bye.'

'Then I shall happen to be going by in my boat every afternoon for the next month or so. There is a dear good soul at the lock who lets lodgings. I shall take up my abode there.'

'Please never land on this pathway again,' said Ida earnestly. 'Miss Pew would be horribly angry if she heard I had spoken to you. And now I must go.'

She withdrew her hand from his grasp, and ran off across the meadow, light-footed as Atalanta. Her heart was beating wildly, beating furiously, when she flew up to her room to take off her hat and jacket and smooth her disordered hair. Never before had any man, except middle-aged Dr. Rylance, talked to her of love: and that this man of all others, this man, sole master of the old mansion she so intensely admired, her friend's kinsman, owner of a good old Saxon name; this man, who could lift her in a moment from poverty to wealth, from obscurity to place and station; that this man should look at her with admiring eyes, and breathe impassioned words into her ear, was enough to set her heart beating tumultuously, to bring hot blushes to her cheeks. It was too wild a dream.

True, that for the man himself, considered apart from his belongings, his name and race, she cared not at all. But just now, in this tumult of excited feeling, she was disposed to confuse the man with his surroundings—to think of him, not as that young man with gray eyes and thin lips, who had walked with her at The Knoll, who had stood

beside her just now by the river, but as the living embodiment of fortune, pride, delight.

Perhaps the vision really dominant in her mind was the thought of herself as mistress of the Abbey, herself as living for ever among the people she loved, amidst those breezy Hampshire hills, in the odour of pine-woods—rich, important, honoured, and beloved, doing good to all who came within the limit of her life. Yes, that was a glorious vision, and its reflected light shone upon Brian Wendover, and in somewise glorified him.

She went down to tea with such a triumphant light in her eyes that the smaller pupils who sat at her end of the table, so as to be under her *surveillance* during the meal, exclaimed at her beauty.

'What a colour you've got, Miss Palliser!' said Lucy Dobbs, 'and how your eyes sparkle! You look as if you'd just had a hamper.'

'I'm not quite so greedy as you, Lucy,' retorted Ida; 'I don't think a hamper would make my eyes sparkle, even if there were anybody to send me one.'

'But there is somebody to send you one,' argued Lucy, with her mouth full of bread and butter; 'your father isn't dead?'

'No.'

'Then he might send you a hamper.'

'He might, if he lived within easy reach of Mauleverer Manor,' replied Ida; 'but as he lives in France——'

'He could send a post-office order to a confectioner in London, and the confectioner would send you a big box of cakes, and marmalade, and jam, and mixed biscuits, and preserved ginger,' said Lucy, her cheeks glowing with the rapture of her theme. 'That is what my mamma and papa did, when they were in Switzerland, on my birthday. I never had such a hamper as that one. I was ill for a week afterwards.'

'And I suppose you were very glad your mother and father were away,' said Ida, while the other children laughed in chorus.

'It was a splendid hamper,' said Lucy, stolidly. 'I shall never forget it. So you see your father might send you a hamper,' she went on, for the sake of argument, 'though he is in France.

'Certainly,' said Ida, 'if I were not too old to care about cakes and jam.'

'*We* are not too old,' persisted Lucy; 'you might share them among us.'

Ida's heart had not stilled its stormy vehemence yet. She talked lightly to her young companions, and tried to eat a little bread and butter, but that insipid fare almost choked her. Her mind was overcharged with thought and wonder.

Could he have meant all or half he said just now?—this young man with the delicate features, pale complexion, and thin lips. He had seemed intensely earnest. Those gray eyes of his, somewhat too pale of hue for absolute beauty, had glowed with a fire which even Ida's inexperience recognized as something above and beyond common feeling. His hand had trembled as it clasped hers. Could there be such a thing as love at first sight? and was she destined to be the object of that romantic passion? She had read of the triumphs of beauty, and she knew that she was handsome. She had been told the fact in too many ways—by praise sometimes, but much

more often by envy—to remain unconscious of her charms. She was scornful of her beauty, inclined to undervalue the gift as compared with the blessings of other girls—a prosperous home, the world's respect, the means to gratify the natural yearnings of youth—but she knew that she was beautiful. And now it seemed to her all at once that beauty was a much more valuable gift than she had supposed hitherto—indeed, a kind of talisman or Aladdin's lamp, which could win for her all she wanted in this world — Wendover Abbey and the position of a country squire's wife. It was not a dazzling or giddy height to which to aspire; but to Ida just now it seemed the topmost pinnacle of social success.

'Oh, what a wretch I am!' she said to herself, presently; 'what a despicable, mercenary creature! I don't care a straw for this man; and yet I am already thinking of myself as his wife.'

And then, remembering how she had once openly declared her intention of marrying for money, she shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

'Ought I to hesitate when the chance comes to me?' she thought. 'I always meant to marry for money, if ever such wonderful fortune as a rich husband fell in my way.'

And yet she had refused Dr. Rylance's offer, without a moment's hesitation. Was it really as he had said, in the bitterness of his wrath, because the offer was not good enough, the temptation not large enough? No, she told herself, she had rejected the smug physician, with his West End mansion and dainty Hampshire villa, his courtly manners, his perfect dress, because the man himself was obnoxious to her. Now, she did not dislike Brian Wendover — indeed, she was rather inclined to like him. She was only just a little disappointed that he was not the ideal Brian of her dreams, the dark-browed cavalier, with grave forehead and eagle eyes. She had a vague recollection of having once heard Blanche say that her cousin Brian of the Abbey was like Sir Tristram's portrait; but this must have been a misapprehension upon her part, since no two faces could have differed

more than the pale, delicate-featured countenance of the living man and the dark rugged face in the picture.

She quieted the trouble of her thoughts as well as she could before tea was over and the evening task of preparation,—the gulfs and straits, the predicates and noun sentences, rule of three, common denominators, and all the dry-as-dust machinery was set in motion again.

Helping her pupils through their difficulties, battling with their stupidities, employed her too closely for any day-dreams of her own. But when prayers had been read, and the school had dispersed, and the butterfly-room was hushed into the silence of midnight, Ida Palliser lay broad awake, wondering at what Fate was doing for her.

'To think that perhaps I am going to be rich after all—honoured, looked up to, able to help those I love,' she thought, thrilling at the splendour of her visions.

Ah! if this thing were verily to come to pass, how kind, how good she would be to others! She

would have them all at the Abbey,—the shabby old half-pay father, shabby no longer in those glorious days; the vulgar little stepmother, improved into elegance; the five-year old brother, that loveliest and dearest of created beings. How lovely to see him rioting in the luxuriance of those dear old gardens, rolling on that velvet sward, racing his favourite dogs round and round the grand old cedars! What a pony he should ride! His daily raiment should be Genoa velvet and old point lace. He should be the admiration and delight of half the county. And Bessie—how kind she could be to Bessie, repaying in some small measure that which never could be fully repaid — the kindness shown by the prosperous girl to the poor dependent. And, above all,—vision sweeter even than the thought of doing good,—how she would trample on Urania Rylance—how the serpentine coils of that damsel's malice and pride could be trodden under foot! Not a ball, not a dinner, not a garden-party given at the Abbey that would not be a thorn in Urania's side, a nail in Urania's coffin.

So ran her fancies — in a very fever — all through the troubled night; but when the first streak of the autumn dawn glimmered coldly in the east, dismal presage of the discordant dressing-bell, then she turned upon her pillow with a weary sigh, and muttered to herself:—

'After all I daresay Mr. Wendover is only fooling me. Perhaps it is his habit to make love to every decent-looking girl he meets.'

The next day Ida walked on the same riverside path, but this time not alone. Her natural modesty shrank from the possibility of a second *tête-à-tête* with her admirer, and she stooped from her solitary state to ask Fraulein Wolf to accompany her in her afternoon walk.

Fraulein was delighted, honoured even, by the request. She was a wishy-washy person, sentimental, vapourish, altogether feeble, and she intensely admired Ida Palliser's vigorous young beauty.

The day was bright and sunny, the air deliciously mild, the river simply divine. The two young women paced the path slowly, talking of

German poetry. The Fraulein knew her Schiller by heart, having expounded him daily for the last four years, and she fondly believed that after Shakespeare Schiller was the greatest poet who had ever trodden this globe.

'And if God had spared him for twenty more years, who knows if he would not have been greater than Shakespeare?' inquired the Fraulein, blandly.

She talked of Schiller's idea of friendship, as represented by the Marquis of Posa.

'Ah,' sighed Ida, 'I doubt if there is any such friendship as that out of a book.'

'I could be like the marquis,' said the Fraulein, smiling tenderly. 'Oh, Ida, you don't know what I would do for anyone I loved—for a dear and valued friend, like you for instance, if you would only let me love you; but you have always held me at arm's length.'

'I did not mean to do so,' answered Ida, frankly; 'but perhaps I am not particularly warm-hearted. It is not in my nature to have many friends. I was very fond of Bessie Wendover

but then she is such a dear clinging thing, like a chubby child that puts its fat arms round your neck—an irresistible creature. She made me love her in spite of myself.'

'Why cannot I make you love me?' asked the fair Gertrude with a languishing look.

Ida could have alleged several reasons, but they would have been unflattering, so she only said feebly,—

'Oh, I really like you very much, and I enjoy talking about German literature with you. Tell me more about Schiller—you know his poetry so well—and Jean Paul. I never can quite understand the German idolatry of him. He is too much in the clouds for me.'

'Too philosophic, you mean,' said Fraulein. 'I love philosophy.'

'"Unless philosophy can make a Juliet it helps not, it avails not,"' said a manly voice from the river close by, and Brian Wendover shot his boat in against the bank and leapt up from among the rushes like a river-god.

Miss Palliser blushed crimson, but it hardly

needed her blushes to convince Fraulein Wolf that this young stranger was a lover. Her sentimental soul thrilled at the idea of having plunged into the very midst of an intrigue.

Ida's heart throbbed heavily, not so much with emotion at beholding her admirer as at the recollection of her visions last night. She tried to look calm and indifferent.

'How do you do?' she said, shaking hands with him. 'Mr. Wendover, Miss Wolf, our German mistress.'

The Fraulein blushed, sniggered, and curtseyed.

'This gentleman is Bessie Wendover's first cousin, Fraulein,' said Ida, with an explanatory air. 'He was staying at The Knoll during the last part of my visit.'

'Yes, and you saw much of each other, and you became heart-friends,' gushed Miss Wolf, beaming benevolently at Brian with her pale green orbs.

Brian answered in very fair German, sinking his voice a little so as only to be heard by the Fraulein, who was in raptures with this young

stranger. So good-looking, so elegant, and speaking Hanoverian German.

He told her that he had seen only too little of Ida at The Knoll, but enough to know that she was his 'Schicksal;' and then he took the Fraulein's hand and pressed it gently.

'I know you are our friend,' he said.

'Bis den Tod,' gasped Gertrude.

After this no one felt any more restraint. The Fraulein dropped into her place of confidante as easily as possible.

'What brings you here again this afternoon, Mr. Wendover?' asked Ida, trying to sustain the idea of being unconcerned in the matter.

'My lode-star; the same that drew me here yesterday, and will draw me here to-morrow.'

'You had better not come here any more; you have no idea what a terrible person Miss Pew is. These riverside fields are her own particular property. Didn't you see the board, "Trespassers will be prosecuted"?'

'Let her prosecute. If her wrath were deadly, I would risk it. You know what Romeo says—

"Wert thou as far
As that vast shore wash'd with the farthest sea,
I would adventure for such merchandize?"

And shall I be afraid of Miss Pew, when the path to my paradise lies so near?'

'Please don't talk such nonsense,' pleaded Ida; 'Fraulein will think you a very absurd person.'

But Miss Wolf protested that she would think, nothing of the sort. Sentiment of that kind was her idea of common sense.

'I am established at Penton Hook,' said Brian. 'I live on the water, and my only thought in life is to be near you. I shall know every stump of willow—every bulrush before I am a month older.'

'But surely you are not going to stay at Penton Hook for a month!' exclaimed Ida, 'buried alive in that little lock-house?'

'I shall have my daily resurrection when I see you.'

'But you cannot imagine that I shall walk upon this path every afternoon, in order that you may land and talk nonsense?' protested Ida.

'I only imagine that this path is your daily walk, and that you would not be so heartless as to change your habits in order to deprive me of the sunshine of your presence,' replied Brian, gazing at her tenderly, as if Miss Wolf counted for nothing, and they two were standing alone among the reeds and willows.

'You will simply make this walk impossible for me. It is quite out of the question that I should come here again so long as you are likely to be lying in wait for me. Is it not so, Fraulein? You know Miss Pew's way of thinking, and how she would regard such conduct.'

Fraulein shook her head dolefully, and admitted that in Miss Pew's social code such a derogation from maiden dignity would be, in a manner, death —an offence beyond all hope of pardon.

'Hang Miss Pew!' exclaimed Brian. 'If Miss Pew were Minerva, with all the weight and influence of her father, the Thunderer, to back her up, I would defy her. Confess now, dear Fraulein—liebste Fraulein'—how tender his accents sounded in German!—'*you* do not think it wrong

for me to see the lady of my love for a few all-too-happy moments once a day?'

The Fraulein declared that it was the most natural thing in the world for them thus to meet, and that she for her part would be enchanted to play propriety, and to be her dearest Ida's companion on all such occasions, nor would thumbscrew or rack extort from her the secret of their loves.

'Nonsense!' exclaimed Ida, 'in future I shall always walk in the kitchen-garden; the walls are ten feet high, and unless you had a horse that could fly, like Perseus, you would never be able to get at me.'

'I will get a flying horse,' answered Brian. 'Don't defy me. Remember there are things that have been heard of before now in love-stories, called ladders.'

After this their conversation became as light and airy as that dandelion seed which every breath of summer blows across the land. They were all three young, happy in health and hope despite of fortune. Ida began to think that Brian Wendover, if in nowise resembling her ideal, was a

very agreeable young man. He was full of life and spirits; he spoke German admirably. He had the Fraulein's idolized Schiller on the tip of his tongue. He quoted Heine's tenderest love songs. Altogether his society was much more intellectual and more agreeable than any to be had at Mauleverer Manor. Miss Wolf parted from him reluctantly, and thought that Ida was unreasonably urgent when she insisted on leaving him at the end of half an hour's dawdling walk up and down the river path.

'Ach, how he is handsome! how he is clever! What for a man!' exclaimed Miss Wolf, as they went back to the Manor grounds, across the dusty high-road, the mere passage over which had a faint flavour of excitement, as a momentary escape into the outside world. 'How proud you must be of his devotion to you!'

'Indeed I am not,' answered Ida, frankly. 'I only wonder at it. We have seen so little of each other; we have known each other so short a time.'

'I don't think time counts for lovers,' argued

the romantic Gertrude. 'One sees a face which is one's fate, and only wonders how one can have lived until that moment, since life must have been so empty without *him*.'

'Have you done that sort of thing often?' asked Ida, with rather a cynical air. 'You talk as if it were a common experience of yours.'

Fraulein Wolf blushed and simpered.

'There was one,' she murmured, 'when I was very young. He was to me as a bright particular star. His father kept a shop, but, oh, his soul would have harmonized with the loftiest rank in the land. He was in the Landwehr. If you had seen him in his uniform—ach, Himmel. He went away to the Franco-Prussian war. I wept for him; I thought of him as Leonora of her Wilhelm. He came back. Ach!'

'Was he a ghost? Did he carry you off to the churchyard?'

'Neither to churchyard nor church,' sighed Gertrude. 'He was false! He married his father's cook—a fat, rosy-cheeked Swabian. All that was delicate and refined in his nature, every poetical

yearning of his soul, had been trampled out of him in that hellish war!'

'I daresay he was hungry after a prolonged existence upon wurst,' said Ida, 'and that instinct drew him to the cook-maid.'

After this there came many afternoons on which the Fraulein and Ida walked in the meadow path by the river, and walk there when they would, the light wherry always came glancing along the tide, and shot in among the reeds, and Miss Palliser's faithful swain was in attendance upon her. On doubtful afternoons, when Ida was inclined to stay indoors, the sentimental Fraulein was always at her side to urge her to take the accustomed walk. Not only was Mr. Wendover's society agreeable to her poetic soul, but he occasionally brought some tender offering in the shape of hot-house grapes or Jersey pears, which were still more welcome to the fair German.

The governesses, Miss Motley, Miss Pillby, and Mademoiselle, were always on duty on fine afternoons, in attendance upon the pupil's regula-

tion walks, long dusty perambulations of dull high roads; and thus it happened that Ida and the Fraulein had the meadow path to themselves.

Nothing occurred during the space of a fortnight to disturb their sense of security. The river side seemed a kind of Paradise, without the possibility of a serpent. Ida's lover had not yet made her any categorical and formal offer of marriage. Indeed, he had never been one minute alone with her since their first meeting; but he talked as if it was a settled thing that they two were to be man and wife in the days to come. He did not speak as if their marriage were an event in the near future; and at this Ida wondered a little, seeing that the owner of Wendover Abbey could have no need to wait for a wife—to consider ways and means—and to be prudently patient, as struggling professional youth must be. This was curious; for that he loved her passionately there could be little doubt. Every look, every tone told her as much a hundred times in an hour. Nor did she make any protest when he spoke of her as one

pledged to him, though no formal covenant had been entered upon. She allowed him to talk as he pleased about their future; and her only wonder was, that in all his conversation he spoke so little of the house in which he was born, and indeed of his belongings generally.

Once she expatiated to Fraulein Wolf in Brian's presence upon the picturesque beauties of the Abbey.

'It is the dearest, noblest old house you can conceive,' she said; 'and the old, old gardens and park are something too lovely: but I believe Mr. Wendover does not care a straw about the place.'

'You know what comes of familiarity,' answered Brian carelessly. "I have seen too much of the Abbey to be moved to rapture by its Gothic charms, every time I see it after the agony of separation.'

'But you would like to live there?'

'I would infinitely prefer living anywhere else. The place is too remote from civilization. A spot one might enjoy, perhaps, on the downhill side of sixty; but in youth or active middle age every sensible man should shun seclusion. A man has to fight against an inherent tendency to lapse into a vegetable.'

'Fox did not become a vegetable,' said Ida; 'yet how he adored St. Ann's Hill!'

'Fox was a hard drinker and a fast liver,' answered Brian. 'If he had not let the clock run down now and then, the works would have worn out sooner than they did.'

'But do you never feel the need of rest?' asked Ida.

Brian stifled a yawn.

'No; I'm afraid I have never worked hard enough for that. The need will come, perhaps, later—when the work comes.'

On more than one occasion when Ida talked of the Abbey, Mr. Wendover replied in the same tone. It was evident that he was indifferent to the family seat, or that he even disliked it. He had no pride in surroundings which might have inspired another man.

'One would think you had been frightened by the family ghost,' Ida said laughingly, 'you so studiously avoid talking about the Abbey.'

'I have not been frightened by the ghost—I am too modern to believe in ghosts.'

'Oh, but it is modern to believe in everything impossible—spirit-rapping, thought-reading.'

'Perhaps; but I am not of that temper.' And then, with a graver look than Ida had ever seen in his face, he said, 'You are full of enthusiasm about that old place among the hills, Ida. I hope you do not care more for the Abbey than for me.'

She crimsoned and looked down. The question touched her weakness too nearly.

'Oh, no,' she faltered; 'what are cedars and limestone as compared with humanity?'

'And if I were without the Abbey—if the Abbey and I were nothing to each other—should I be nobody in your sight?'

'It is difficult to dissociate a man from his surroundings,' she answered; 'but I suppose you would be just the same person?'

'I hope so,' said Brian. '"The rank is but the guinea stamp, the man's a man for a' that." But the guinea stamp is an uncommonly good thing in its way, I admit.'

These afternoon promenades between four and five o'clock, while the rest of the school was

out walking, had been going on for a fortnight, and no harm to Ida had come of her indiscretion. Perhaps she hardly considered how wrong a thing she was doing in violating Miss Pew's confidence by conduct so entirely averse from Miss Pew's ideas of good behaviour. The confidence had been so grudgingly given, Miss Pew had been so systematically unkind, that the girl may be forgiven for detesting her, nay, even for glorying in the notion of acting in a manner which would shock all Miss Pew's dearest prejudices. Her meeting with her lover could scarcely be called clandestine, for she took very little pains to conceal the fact. If the affair had gone on secretly for so long, it was because of no artifice on her part.

But that any act of any member of the Mauleverer household could remain long unknown was almost an impossibility. If there had been but one pair of eyes in the establishment, and those the eyes of Miss Pillby, the thing would have been discovered; for those pale unlovely orbs were as the eyes of Argus himself in their

manifold power to spy out the proceedings of other people—more especially of any person whom their owner disliked.

Now Miss Pillby had never loved Ida Palliser, objecting to her on broad grounds as a person whose beauty and talents were an indirect injury to mediocre people. Since Ida's visit to The Knoll her angry feeling had intensified with every mention of the pleasures and comforts of that abode. Miss Pillby, who never opened a book for her own pleasure, who cared nothing for music, and whose highest notion of art was all black-lead pencil and bread-crumbs, had plenty of vacant space in her mind for other people's business. She was a sharp observer of the fiddle-faddle of daily life; she had a keen scent for evil motives underlying simple actions. Thus when she perceived the intimacy which had newly arisen between the Fraulein and Miss Palliser, she told herself that there must be some occult reason for the fact. Why did those two always walk together? What hidden charm had they discovered in the river-meadow?

For this question, looked at from Miss Pillby's point of view, there could be only one answer. The attraction was masculine. One or other of the damsels must have an admirer whom she contrived to see somehow, or to correspond with somehow, during her meadow walk. That the thing had gone so far as it really had gone, that any young lady at Mauleverer could dare to walk and talk with an unlicensed man in the broad light of day, was more than Miss Pillby's imagination could conceive. But she speculated upon some transient glimpse of a man on the opposite bank, or in the middle distance of the river — a handkerchief waved, a signal given, perhaps a love-letter hidden in a hollow tree. This was about the culminating point to which any intrigue at Mauleverer had ever reached hitherto. Beyond this Miss Pillby's fancy ventured not.

It was on the second Sunday in October, when the Mauleverer pupils were beginning to look forward, almost hopefully, to the Christmas vacation, that a flood of light streamed suddenly

upon Miss Pillby's troubled mind. The revelation happened in this wise. Evening service at a smart little newly-built church where the function was Anglican to the verge of Ritualism, was a privilege reserved for the elder and more favoured of the Mauleverer flock. All the girls liked this evening service at St. Dunstan's. It had a flavour of dissipation. The lamps, the music, the gaily decorated altar, the Saint's-day banners and processional hymn, were faintly suggestive of the opera. The change from the darkness of the country road to the glow and glitter of the tabernacle was thrilling. Evening service at St. Dunstan's was the most exciting event of the week. There was a curate who intoned exquisitely, with that melodious snuffle so dear to modern congregations, and whose voice had a dying fall when he gave out a hymn which almost moved girl-worshippers to tears. He was thought to be in a consumption—had a little dry hacking cough, actually caused by relaxed tonsils, but painfully recalling her of the camelias. The Mauleverer girls called him interesting, and

hoped that he would never marry, but live and die like St. Francis de Sales. On this particular Sunday, Miss Pew—vulgarly Old Pew—happened to be unusually amiable. That morning's post had brought her the promise of three new pupils, daughters of a mighty sheep farmer lately returned from Australia, and supposed to be a millionaire. He was a widower, and wanted motherly care for his orphans. They were to be clothed as well as fed at Mauleverer; they were to have all those tender cares and indulgences which a loving mother could give them. This kind of transaction was eminently profitable to the Miss Pews. Maternal care meant a tremendous list of extra charges — treats, medical attendance, little comforts of all kinds, from old port to lambs-wool sleeping-socks. Orphans of this kind were the pigeons whose tender breasts furnished the down with which that experienced crow, Miss Pew, feathered her nest. She had read the Australian's letter over three times before evening service, and she was inclined to think kindly of the human race; so when Miss Palliser asked

if she too—she, the Pariah, might go to St. Dunstan's—she, whose general duty of a Sunday evening was to hear the little ones their catechism, or keep them quiet by reading aloud to them 'Pilgrim's Progress,' or 'Agathos,' perhaps—Miss Pew said, loftily, 'I do not see any objection.'

There was no kindness, no indulgence in her tone, but she said she saw no objection, and Ida flew off to put on her bonnet, that poor little black lace bonnet with yellow rosebuds which had done duty for so many services.

It was a relief to get away from school, and its dull monotony, even for a couple of hours ; and then there was the music. Ida loved music too passionately to be indifferent to the harmony of village voices, carefully trained to sing her favourite hymns to the sound of a small but excellent organ.

The little church was somewhat poorly attended on this fine autumn evening, when the hunter's moon hung like a big golden shield above the river, glorifying the dipping willows, the narrow eyots, haunts of swan and cygnet, and the distant woodlands of Surrey. It was a night which tempted the free to

wander in the cool shadowy river-side paths, rather than to worship in the warm little temple.

The Mauleverer girls made a solid block of humanity on one side of the nave, but on the other side the congregation was scattered thinly in the open oaken seats.

Miss Pillby, perusing those figures within her view, as she stood in the back row of the school seats, perceived a stranger—a stranger of elegant and pleasing appearance, who was evidently casting stolen glances at the lambs of the Mauleverer fold. Nor was Miss Pillby's keen eye slow to discover for which lamb those ardent looks were intended. The object of the stranger's admiration was evidently Ida Palliser.

'I thought as much,' mused Miss Pillby, as she listened, or seemed to listen, to the trials and triumphs of the children of Israel, chanted by fresh young voices with a decidedly rural twang; 'this explains everything.'

When they left the church, Miss Pillby was perfectly aware of the stranger following the Mauleverer flock, evidently in the hope of getting

speech with Miss Palliser. He hung on the pathway near them, he shot ahead of them, and then turned and strolled slowly back. All in vain. Ida was too closely hemmed in and guarded for him to get speech of her; and the maiden procession passed on without any violation of the proprieties.

'Did you see that underbred young man following us as we came home?' asked Miss Pillby, with a disgusted air, as she shared an invigorating repast of bread and butter and toast and water with the pupils who had been to church. 'Some London shopman, no doubt, by his bad manners.' She stole a look at Ida, who flushed ever so slightly, at hearing Brian Wendover thus maligned.

Fraulein Wolf slept in the room occupied by Miss Pillby and Miss Motley—three narrow iron bedsteads in a particularly inconvenient room, always devoted to governesses, and supposed to be a temple of learning.

While Miss Motley was saying her prayers, Miss Pillby wriggled up to the Fraulein, who was calmly brushing her flaxen tresses, and whispered

impetuously, 'I have seen him! I know all about it!'

'Ach Himmel,' cried the Fraulein. 'Thou wouldst not betray?'

'Not for the world.'

'Is he not handsome, godlike?' demanded the Fraulein, still in German.

'Yes, he is very nice-looking. Don't tell Palliser that I know anything about him. She mightn't like it.'

The Fraulein shook her head, and put her finger to her lips, just as Miss Motley rose from her knees, remarking that it was impossible for anybody to pray in a proper business-like manner with such whispering and chattering going on.

Next day Miss Pillby contrived to get a walk in the garden before the early dinner. Here among the asparagus beds she had a brief conversation with a small boy employed in the kitchen-garden, a youth whose mother washed for the school, and had frequent encounters with Miss Pillby, that lady having charge of the

linen, and being, in the laundress's eye, a power in the establishment. Miss Pillby had futhermore been what she called 'kind' to the laundress's hope. She had insisted upon his learning his catechism, and attending church twice every Sunday, and she had knitted him a comforter, the material being that harsh and scrubby worsted which makes the word comforter a sound of derision.

Strong in the sense of these favours, Miss Pillby put it upon the boy as a duty which he owed to her and to society to watch Ida Palliser's proceedings in the river-meadow. She also promised him sixpence if he found out anything bad.

The influence of the Church Catechism, learned by rote, parrot fashion, had not awakened in the laundress's boy any keen sense of honour. He had a dim feeling that it was a shabby service which he was called upon to perform; but then of course Miss Pillby, who taught the young ladies, and who was no doubt a wise and discreet personage, knew best; and a possible sixpence was a great temptation.

'Them rushes and weeds down by the bank wants cutting. Gar'ner told me about it last week,' said the astute youth. 'I'll do 'em this very afternoon.'

'Do, Sam. Be there between four and five. Keep out of sight as much as you can, but be well within hearing. I want you to tell me all that goes on.'

'And when shall I see you agen, miss?'

'Let me see. That's rather difficult. I'm afraid it can't be managed till to-morrow. You are in the house at six every morning to clean the boots?'

'Yes, miss.'

'Then I'll come down to the boot-room at half-past six to-morrow morning and hear what you've got to tell me.'

'Lor, miss, it's such a mucky place—all among the coal-cellars.'

'I don't mind,' said Miss Pillby; which was quite true. There was no amount of muckiness Miss Pillby would not have endured in order to injure a person she disliked.

'I have never shrunk from my duty, however painful it might be, Sam!' she said, and left the youth impressed by the idea of her virtues.

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In the duskiness of the October dawn Miss Pillby stole stealthily down by back stairs and obscure passages to the boot-room, where she found Sam hard at work with brushes and blacking, by the light of a tallow candle, in an atmosphere flavoured with coals.

'Well, Sam?' asked the vestal, eagerly.

'Well, miss, I seed 'em and I heerd 'em,' answered the boy; 'such goin's on. Orful!'

'What kind of thing, Sam?'

'Love-makin' miss; keepin' company. The young ladies hadn't been there five minutes when a boat dashes up to the bank, and a young gent jumps ashore. My, how he went on! I was down among the rushes, right under his feet, as you may say, most of the time, and I heerd him beautiful. How he did talk; like a poetry book!'

'Did he kiss her?'

'Yes, miss, just one, as they parted company. She was very stand-offish with him, but he cotched

hold of her just as she was wishing of him good-bye. He gave her a squeedge like, and took her unawares. It was only one kiss, yer know, miss, but he made it last as long as he could. The foreigner looked the other way.'

'Shameful crertures, both of them!' exclaimed Miss Pillby. 'There's your sixpence, Sam, and don't say a word to anybody about what you've seen, till I tell you. I may want you to repeat it all to Miss Pew. If I do, I'll give you another sixpence.'

'Lawks, miss, that would be cheap at a shilling,' said the boy. 'It would freeze my blood to have to stand up to talk before Miss Pew.'

'Nonsense, Sam, you will be only telling the truth, and there can be nothing to frighten you. However, I daresay she will be satisfied with my statement. She won't want confirmation from you.'

'Confirmation from me,' muttered Sam, as Miss Pillby left his den. 'No, I should think not. Why, that's what the bishops do. Fancy old Pew being confirmed too—old Pew in a white frock and a weil. That is a good 'un,' and Sam exploded over his blacking-brush at the preposterous idea.

It was Miss Pew's habit to take a cup of tea and a square of buttered toast every morning at seven, before she left her pillow; in order to fortify herself for the effort of getting up and dressing, so as to be in her place, at the head of the chief table in the school dining-room, when eight o'clock struck. Had Miss Pew consulted her own inclination she would have reposed until a much later hour; but the maintenance of discipline compelled that she should be the head and front of all virtuous movements at Mauleverer Manor. How could she inveigh with due force against the sin of sloth if she were herself a slug-a-bed? Therefore did Miss Pew vanquish the weakness of the flesh, and rise at a quarter past seven, summer and winter. But this struggle between duty and inclination made the lady's temper somewhat critical in the morning hours.

Now it was the custom for one of the mistresses to carry Miss Pew's tea-tray, and to attend at her bedside while she sipped her bohea and munched her toast. It was a delicate attention, a recognition of her dignity, which Miss Pew liked

It was the *lever du roi* upon a small scale. And this afforded an opportunity for the mistress on duty to inform her principal of any small fact in connection with the school or household which it was well for Miss Pew to know. Not for worlds would Sarah Pew have encouraged a spy, according to her own view of her own character; but she liked people with keen eyes, who could tell her everything that was going on under her roof.

'Good morning, Pillby,' said Miss Pew, sitting up against a massive background of pillows, like a female Jove upon a bank of clouds, an awful figure in frilled white raiment, with an eye able to command, but hardly to flatter; 'what kind of a day is it?'

'Dull and 'eavy,' answered Miss Pillby; 'I shouldn't wonder if there was a thunderstorm.'

'Don't talk nonsense, child; it's too late in the year for thunder. We shall have the equinoctial gales soon, I dare say.'

'No doubt,' replied Miss Pillby, who had heard about the equinox and its carryings on all her life without having arrived at any clear idea

of its nature and properties, 'we shall have it very equinoctial before the end of the month, I've no doubt.'

'Well, is there anything going on? Any of the girls bilious? One of my black draughts wanted anywhere?'

Miss Pew was not highly intellectual, but she was a great hand at finance, household economies, and domestic medicine. She compounded most of the doses taken at Mauleverer with her own fair hands, and her black draughts were a feature in the school. The pupils never forgot them. However faint became the memory of youthful joys in after years, the flavour of Miss Pew's jalap and senna was never obliterated.

'No; there's nobody ill this morning,' answered Miss Pillby, with a faint groan.

'Ah, you may well sigh,' retorted her principal; 'the way those girls ate veal and ham yesterday was enough to have turned the school into a hospital —and with raspberry jam tart after, too.'

Veal with ham was the Sunday dinner at Mauleverer, a banquet upon which Miss Pew prided

herself, as an instance of luxurious living rarely to be met with in boarding-schools. If the girls were ill after it, that was their look out.

'There's something wrong, I can see by your face,' said Miss Pew, after she had sipped half her tea and enjoyed the whole of her toast; 'is it the servants or the pupils?'

Strange to say, Miss Pew did not look grateful to the bearer of evil tidings. This was one of her idiosyncrasies. She insisted upon being kept informed of all that went wrong in her establishment, but she was apt to be out of temper with the informant.

'Neither,' answered Miss Pillby, with an awful shake of her sandy locks; 'I don't believe there is a servant in this house who would so far forget herself. And as to the pupils——'

'We know what they are,' snapped Miss Pew; 'I never heard of anything bad enough to be beyond their reach. Who is it?'

'Your clever pupil teacher, Ida Palliser.'

'Ah,' grunted Miss Pew, setting down her cup; 'I can believe anything of her. That girl was born to be troublesome. What has she done now?'

Miss Pillby related the circumstances of Miss Palliser's crime, setting forth her own cleverness in the course of her narrative—how her misgivings had been excited by the unwonted familiarity between Ida and the Fraulein—a young person always open to suspicion as a stranger in the land—how her fears had been confirmed by the conduct of an unknown man in the church; and how, urged by her keen sense of duty, she had employed Mrs. Jones's boy to watch the delinquents.

'I'll make an example of her,' said Miss Pew, flinging back the bed-clothes with a tragic air as she rose from her couch. 'That will do, Pillby. I want no further details. I'll wring the rest out of that bold-faced minx in the face of all the school. You can go.'

And without any word of praise or thanks from her principal, Miss Pillby retired; yet she knew in her heart that for this piece of ill news Miss Pew was not ungrateful.

Never had Sarah Pew looked more awful than she appeared that morning at the breakfast table, clad in sombre robes of olive-green merino, and a

cap bristling with olive-green berries and brambly twigs—a cap which to the more advanced of the pupils suggested the head-gear of Medusa.

Miss Dulcibella, gentle, limp, sea-greeny, looked at her stronger-minded sister, and was so disturbed by the gloom upon that imperial brow as to be unable to eat her customary rasher. Not a word did Miss Pew speak to sister or mistresses during that brief but awful meal; but when the delf breakfast cups were empty, and the stacks of thick bread and butter had diminished to nothingness, and the girls were about to rise and disperse for their morning studies, Miss Pew's voice arose suddenly amidst them like the sound of thunder.

'Keep your seats, if you please, young ladies. I am about to make an example; and I hope what I have to say and do may be for the general good. Miss Palliser, stand up.'

Ida rose in her place, at that end of the table where she was supposed to exercise a corrective influence upon the younger pupils. She stood up where all the rest were seated, a tall and perfect figure, a beautiful statuesque head, supported by a

neck like a marble column. She stood up among all those other girls, the handsomest of them all, pale, with flashing eyes, feeling very sure that she was going to be ill treated.

'Pray, Miss Palliser, who is the person whom it is your daily habit to meet and converse with in my grounds? Who is the man who has dared to trespass on my meadow at your invitation?'

'Not at my invitation,' answered Ida, as calm as marble. 'The gentleman came of his own accord. His name is Brian Wendover, and he and I are engaged to be married.'

Miss Pew laughed a loud ironical laugh, a laugh which froze the blood of all the seventeen-year-old pupils who were not without fear or reproach upon the subject of clandestine glances, little notes, or girlish carryings-on in the flirtation line.

'Engaged?' she exclaimed, in her stentorian voice. 'That is really too good a joke. Engaged? Pray, which Mr. Brian Wendover is it?'

'Mr. Wendover of the Abbey.'

'Mr. Wendover of the Abbey, the head of the

Wendover family?' cried Miss Pew. 'And you would wish us to believe that Mr. Wendover, of Wendover Abbey — a gentleman with an estate worth something like seven thousand a year, young ladies—has engaged himself to the youngest of my pupil-teachers, whose acquaintance he has cultivated while trespassing on my meadow? Miss Palliser, when a gentleman of Mr. Wendover's means and social status wishes to marry a young person in your position — a concatenation which occurs very rarely in the history of the human race—he comes to the hall door. Mr. Wendover no more means to marry you than he means to marry the moon. His views are of quite a different kind, and you know it.'

Ida cast a withering look at her tyrant, and moved quickly from her place.

'You are a wretch to say such a thing to me, she cried passionately; 'I will not stay another hour under your roof to be so insulted.'

'No, you will not stay under my roof, Miss Palliser,' retorted Miss Pew. 'My mind was made up more than an hour ago on that point. You

will not be allowed to stay in this house one minute longer than is needed for the packing up of your clothes, and that, I take it,' added the schoolmistress, with an insolent laugh, 'will not be a lengthy operation. You are expelled, Miss Palliser — expelled from this establishment for grossly improper conduct; and I am only sorry for your poor father's sake that you will have to begin your career as a governess with disgrace attached to your name.'

'There is no disgrace, except in your own foul mind,' said Ida. 'I can imagine that as nobody ever admired you or made love to you when you were young, you may have mistaken ideas as to the nature of lovers and love-making,' —despite the universal awe, this provoked a faint, irrepressible titter—'but it is hard that you should revenge your ignorance upon me. Mr. Wendover has never said a word to me which a gentleman should not say. Fraulein Wolf, who has heard his every word, knows that this is true.'

'Fraulein will leave this house to-morrow, if she is not careful,' said Miss Pew, who had, how-

ever, no intention of parting with so useful and cheap a teacher.

She could afford to revenge herself upon Ida, whose period of tutelage was nearly over.

'Fraulein knows that Mr. Wendover speaks of our future as the future of man and wife.'

'Ja wohl,' murmured the Fraulein, 'that is true; ganz und gar.'

'I will not hear another word!' cried Miss Pew, swelling with rage, while every thorn and berry on her autumnal cap quivered. 'Ungrateful, impudent young woman! Leave my house instantly. I will not have these innocent girls perverted by your vile example. In speech and in conduct you are alike detestable.'

'Good-bye, girls,' cried Ida, lightly; 'you all know how much harm my speech and my example have done you. Good-bye, Fraulein; don't you be afraid of dismissal,—you are too well worth your salt.'

Polly Cobb, the brewer's daughter, sat near the door by which Ida had to make her exit. She was quite the richest, and perhaps the best-

natured girl in the school, She caught hold of Ida's gown and thrust a little Russia-leather purse into her hand, with a tender squeeze.

'Take it, dear,' she whispered; 'I don't want it; I can get plenty more. Yes, yes, you must; you shall. I'll make a row, and get myself into disgrace, if you refuse. You can't go to France without money.'

'God bless you, dear. I'll send it you back,' answered Ida.

'Don't; I shall hate you if you do.'

'Is that young woman gone?' demanded Miss Pew's awful voice.

'Going, going, gone!' cried Miss Cobb, forgetting herself in her excitement, as the door closed behind Ida.

'Who was that?' roared Miss Pew.

Half a dozen informants pronounced Miss Cobb's name.

Now Miss Cobb's people were wealthy, and Miss Cobb had younger sisters, all coming on under a homely governess to that critical stage in which they would require the polishing processes of

Mauleverer Manor: so Sarah Pew bridled her wrath, and said quietly—

'Kindly reserve your jocosity for a more appropriate season, Miss Cobb. Young ladies, you may proceed with your matutinal duties.'

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE LOCK-HOUSE.

Miss Pew had argued rightly that the process of packing would not be a long one with Ida Palliser. The girl had come to Mauleverer with the smallest number of garments compatible with decency; and her stock had been but tardily and scantily replenished during her residence in that manorial abode. It was to her credit that she had contrived still to be clean, still to be neat, under such adverse conditions; it was Nature's royal gift that she had looked grandly beautiful in the shabbiest gowns and mantles ever seen at Mauleverer.

She huddled her poor possessions into her solitary trunk—a battered hair trunk which had done duty ever since she came as a child from India. She put a few necessaries into a convenient

morocco bag, which the girls in her class had clubbed their pocket-money to present to her on her last birthday; and then she washed the traces of angry tears from her face, put on her hat and jacket, and went downstairs, carrying her bag and umbrella.

One of the housemaids met her in the hall, a buxom, good-natured country girl.

'Is it true that you are going to leave us, miss?' she asked.

'What, you all know it already?' exclaimed Ida.

'Everybody is talking about it, miss. The young ladies are all on your side; but they dared not speak up before Miss Pew.'

'I suppose not. Yes, it is quite true; I am expelled, Eliza; sent out into the world without a character, because I allowed Mr. Wendover to walk and talk with the Fraulein and me for half an hour or so in the river meadow! Mr. Wendover, my best, my only friend's first cousin. Rather hard, isn't it?'

'Hard? it's shameful,' cried the girl. 'I

should like to see old Pew turning me off for keeping company with my young man. But she daren't do it. Good servants are hard to get nowadays; or any servants, indeed, for the paltry wages she gives.'

'And governesses are a drug in the market,' said Ida, bitterly. 'Good-bye, Eliza.'

'Where are you going, miss? Home?'

'Yes; I suppose so.'

The reckless tone, the careless words, alarmed the good-hearted housemaid.

'Oh, miss, pray go home, straight home—wherever your home is. You are too handsome to be going about alone among strangers. It's a wicked world, miss—wickeder than you know of, perhaps. Have you got money enough to get you home comfortable?'

'I'll see,' answered Ida, taking out Miss Cobb's fat little purse and looking into it.

There were two sovereigns and a good deal of silver—a tremendous fortune for a schoolgirl; but then it was said that Cobb Brothers coined money by the useful art of brewing.

'Yes; I have plenty of money for my journey,' said Ida.

'Are you certain sure, now, miss?' pleaded the housemaid; 'for if you ain't, I've got a pound laid by in my drawer ready to put in the Post Office Savings Bank, and you're as welcome to it as flowers in May, if you'll take it off me.'

'God bless you, Eliza. If I were in any want of money, I'd gladly borrow your sovereign; but Miss Cobb has lent me more than I want. Good-bye.'

Ida held out her hand, which the housemaid, after wiping her own paw upon her apron, clasped affectionately.

'God bless you, Miss Palliser,' she said, fervently; 'I shall miss the sight of your handsome face when I waits at table.'

A minute more and Ida stood in the broad carriage sweep, with her back to the stately old mansion which had sheltered her so long, and in which, despite her dependency and her poverty, she had known some light-hearted hours. Now, where was she to go? and what was she to do with her life? She stood with the autumn wind

blowing about her—the fallen chestnut leaves drifting to her feet—pondering that question.

Was she or was she not Brian Wendover's affianced wife? How far was she to trust in him, to lean upon him, in this crucial hour of her life? There had been so much playfulness in their love-making, his tone had been for the most part so light and sportive, that now, when she stood, as it were, face to face with destiny, she hardly knew how to think of him, whether as a rock that she might lean upon, or as a reed that would give way at her touch. Rock or reed, womanly instinct told her that it was not to this fervent admirer she must apply for aid or counsel yet awhile. Her duty was to go home at once—to get across the Channel, if possible, as quickly as Miss Pew's letter to her father.

Intent on doing this, she walked along the dusty high road by the river, in the direction of the railway station. This station was more than two miles distant, a long, straight walk by the river, and then a mile or so across fields and by narrow lanes to an arid spot, where some newly-built

houses were arising round a hopeless-looking little loop-line station, in a desert of agricultural land.

She had walked about three-quarters of a mile, when she heard the rapid dip of oars, as if in pursuit of her, and a familiar voice calling to her.

It was Brian, who almost lived in his boat, and who had caught sight of her in the distance, and followed at racing speed.

'What are you doing?' he asked, coming up close to the bank, and standing up in his boat. 'Where are you going at such a pace? I don't think I ever saw a woman walk so fast.'

'Was I walking fast?' she asked, unconscious of the impetus which excitement had given to her movements.

She knew in her heart of hearts that she did not love him—that love—the passion which she had read of in prose and poetry, was still a stranger to her soul: but just at this moment, galled and stung by Miss Pew's unkindness, heart-sick at her own absolute desolation, the sound of his voice was sweet in her ears, the look of the tall slim figure, the friendly face turned towards her, was

pleasant to her eyes. No, he was not a reed, he was a rock. She felt protected and comforted by his presence.

'Were you walking fast? Galloping like a three-year-old—*quæ velut latis equa trima campis*,' quoted Brian. 'Are you running away from Mauleverer Manor?'

'I am going away,' she answered calmly. 'I have been expelled.'

'Ex——what?' roared Brian.

'I have been expelled—sent away at a minute's notice—for the impropriety of my conduct in allowing you to talk to me in the river-meadow.'

Brian had been fastening his boat to a pollard willow as he talked. He leapt on to the bank, and came close to Ida's side.

'My darling, my dearest love, what a burning shame! What a villainous old hag that Pew woman must be! Bessie told me she was a Tartar, but this beats everything. Expelled! Your conduct impeached because you let me talk to you——I, Bessie's cousin, a man who at the worst has some claim to be considered a gentleman, while

you have the highest claim to be considered a lady. It is beyond all measure infamous.'

'It was rather hard, was it not?' said Ida quietly.

'Abominable, insufferable! I—well. I'll call upon the lady this afternoon, and make her acquainted with my sentiments upon the subject. The wicked old harridan.'

'Please don't,' urged Ida, smiling at his wrath; 'it doesn't give me any consolation to hear you call her horrid names.'

'Did you tell her that I had asked you to be my wife?'

'I said something to that effect—in self-defence—not from any wish to commit you: and she told me that a man in your position, who intended to marry a girl in my position, would act in a very different manner from the way in which you have acted.'

'Did she? She is a wise judge of human nature—and of a lover's nature, above all. Well, Ida, dearest, we have only one course open to us, and that is to give her the lie at once—by our

conduct. Deeds, not words, shall be our argument. You do care for me—just a little—don't you, pet? just well enough to marry me? All the rest will come after?'

'Whom else have I to care for?' faltered Ida, with downcast eyes and passionately throbbing heart. 'Who else has ever cared for me?'

'I am answered. So long as I am the only one I will confide all the rest to Fate. We will be married to-morrow.'

'To-morrow! No, no, no.'

'Yes, yes, yes. What is there to hinder our immediate marriage? And what can be such a crushing answer to that old Jezebel? We will be married at the little church where I saw you last Sunday night, looking like St. Cecilia when you joined in the Psalms. We have been both living in the same parish for the last fortnight. I will run up to Doctors' Commons this afternoon, bring back the licence, interview the parson, and have everything arranged for our being married at ten o'clock to-morrow morning.'

'No, no, not for the world.'

For some time the girl was firm in her refusal of such a hasty union. She would not marry her lover except in the face of the world, with the full consent of his friends and her own. Her duty was to go by the first train and boat that would convey her to Dieppe, and to place herself in her father's care.

'Do you think your father would object to our marriage?' asked Brian.

'No, I am sure he would not object,' she answered, smiling within herself at the question.

As if Captain Palliser, living upon his half-pay, and the occasional benefactions of a rich kinsman, could by any possibility object to a match that would make his daughter mistress of Wendover Abbey!

'Then why delay our marriage, in order to formally obtain a consent which you are sure of beforehand? As for my friends, Bessie's people are the nearest and dearest, and you know what their feelings are on your behalf.'

'Bessie likes me as her friend. I don't know how she might like me as her cousin's wife,' said Ida.

"Then I will settle your doubts by telling you a little secret. Bessie sent me here to try and win you for my wife. It was her desire as well as mine.'

More arguments followed, and against the lover's ardent pleading there was only a vague idea of duty in the girl's mind, somewhat weakened by an instinctive notion that her father would think her an arrant fool for delaying so grand a triumph as her marriage with a man of fortune and position. Had he not often spoken to her wistfully of her beauty, and the dim hope that her handsome face might some day win her a rich husband?

'It's a poor chance at the best,' he told her. 'The days of the Miss Gunnings have gone by. The world has grown commercial. Nowadays money marries money.'

And this chance, which her father had speculated upon despondently as a remote contingency, was now at her feet. Was she to spurn it, and then go back to the shabby little villa near Dieppe, and expect to be praised for her filial duty?

While she wavered, Brian urged every argument

which a lover could bring to aid his suit. To-morrow they might be married, and in the meanwhile Ida could be safely and comfortably housed with the good woman at the Lock-house. Brian would give up his lodgings to her, and would stay at the hotel at Chertsey. Ida listened, and hesitated: before her lay the dry, dusty road, the solitary journey by land and sea, the doubtful welcome at home. And here by her side stood the wealthy lover, the very embodiment of protecting power—is not every girl's first lover in her eyes as Olympian Jove?—eager to take upon himself the burden of her life, to make her footsteps easy.

'Step into the boat, dearest,' he said; 'I know your heart has decided for me. You are not afraid to trust me, Ida?'

'Afraid? no,' she answered, frankly, looking at him with heavenly confidence in her large dark eyes; 'I am only afraid of doing wrong.'

'You can do no wrong with me by your side, your husband to-morrow, responsible for all the rest of your existence.'

'True; after to-morrow I shall be accountable to

no one but you,' she said, thoughtfully. 'How strange it seems!'

'At the worst, I hope you will find me better than old Pew,' answered Brian lightly.

'You are too good—too generous,' she said; 'but I am afraid you are acting too much from impulse. Have you considered what you are going to do? have you thought what it is to marry a penniless girl, who can give you none of the things which the world cares for in exchange for your devotion?'

'I have thought what it is to marry the woman I fondly love, the loveliest girl these eyes ever looked upon. Step into my boat, Ida; I must row you up to the lock, and then start for London by the first train I can catch. I don't know how early the licence-shop closes.'

She obeyed him, and sank into a seat in the stern of the cockle-shell craft, exhausted, mentally and physically, by the agitation of the last two hours. She felt an unspeakable relief in sitting quietly in the boat, the water rippling gently past, like a lullaby, the rushes and willows waving in

the mild western breeze. Henceforth she had little to do in life but to be cared for and cherished by an all-powerful lord and master. Wealth to her mind meant power; and this devoted lover was rich. Fate had been infinitely kind to her.

It was a lovely October morning, warm and bright as August. The river banks still seemed to wear their summer green, the blue bright water reflected the cloudless blue above. The bells were ringing for a saint's-day service as Brian's boat shot past the water-side village, with its old square-towered church. All the world had a happy look, as if it smiled at Ida and her choice.

They moved with an easy motion past the pastoral banks, here and there a villa garden, here and there a rustic inn, and so beneath Chertsey's wooded heights to the level fields beyond, and to a spot where the Thames and the Abbey River made a loop round a verdant little marshy island; and here was the silvery weir, brawling noisily in its ceaseless fall, and the lock-house, where Mr. Wendover had lodgings.

The proprietress of that neat abode had just

been letting a boat through the lock, and stood leaning lazily against the wood-work, tasting the morning air. She was a comfortable, well-to-do person, who rented a paddock or two by the towing-path, and owned cows. Her little garden was gay with late geraniums and many-coloured asters.

'Mrs. Topman, I have brought you a young lady to take care of for the next twenty-four hours,' said Brian, coolly, as he handed Ida out of the boat. 'Miss Palliser and I are going to be married to-morrow morning; and, as her friends all live abroad, I want you to take care of her, in a nice, motherly way, till she and I are one. You can give her my rooms, and I can put up at the inn.'

Mrs. Topman curtsied, and gazed admiringly at Ida.

'I shall be proud to wait upon such a sweet young lady,' she said. 'But isn't it rather sudden? You told me there was a young lady in the case, but I never knowed you was going to be married off-hand like this.'

'I never knew it myself till an hour ago, Mrs. Topman,' answered Brian, gaily. 'I knew that

I was to be one of the happiest of men some day; but I did not know bliss was so near me. And now I am off to catch the next train from Chertsey. Be sure you give Miss Palliser some breakfast; I don't think she has had a very comfortable one.'

He dashed into the cottage and came out again five minutes afterwards, having changed his boating clothes for a costume more appropriate to the streets of London. He clasped Ida's hand, murmured a loving good-bye, and then ran with light footsteps along the towing-path, while Ida stood leaning against the lock door looking dreamily down at the water.

How light-hearted he was! and how easily he took life! This marriage, which was to her an awful thing, signifying fate and the unknown future, seemed to him as a mere whim of the hour, a caprice, a fancy. And yet there could be no doubt of his affection for her. Even if his nature was somewhat shallow, as she feared it must be, he was at least capable of a warm and generous attachment. To her in her poverty and her disgrace he had proved himself nobly loyal.

'I ought to be very grateful to him,' she said to herself; and then in her schoolgirl phrase she added, 'and he is very nice.'

Mrs. Topman was in the house, tidying and smartening that rustic sitting-room, which had not been kept too neatly during Mr. Wendover's occupation. Presently came the clinking of cups and saucers, and anon Mrs. Topman appeared on the doorstep, and announced that breakfast was ready.

What a luxurious breakfast it seemed to the schoolgirl, after a month of the Mauleverer bread and scrape! Frizzled bacon, new laid eggs, cream, marmalade, and a dainty little cottage loaf, all served with exquisite cleanliness. Ida was too highly strung to do justice to the excellent fare, but she enjoyed a cup of strong tea, and ate one of the eggs, to oblige Mrs. Topman, who waited upon her assiduously, palpably panting with friendly curiosity.

'Do take off your hat, miss,' she urged; 'you must be very tired after your journey—a long journey, I daresay. Perhaps you would like me to send a boy with a barrow for your luggage directly

after breakfast. I suppose your trunks are at the station?'

'No; Mr. Wendover will arrange about my trunk by-and-by,' faltered Ida; and then looking down at her well-worn gray cashmere gown, she thought that it was hardly a costume in which to be married. Yet how was she to get her box from Mauleverer Manor without provoking dangerous inquiries? and even if she had the box its contents would hardly solve the question of a wedding gown. Her one white gown would be too cold for the season; her best gown was black. Would Brian feel very much ashamed of her, she wondered, if she must needs be married in that shabby gray cashmere?

And then it occurred to her that possibly Brian, while procuring the licence, might have a happy thought about a wedding gown, and buy her one ready made at a London draper's. He, to whom money was no object, could so easily get an appropriate costume. It would be only for him to go into a shop and say, 'I want a neat, pretty travelling dress for a tall slim young lady,' and the

thing would be packed in a box and put into his cab in a trice. Everything in life is made so easy for people with ample means.

It was some time before Mrs. Topman would consent to leave her new lodger. She was so anxious to be of use to the sweet young lady, and threw out as many feelers as an octopus in the way of artfully-devised conjectures and suppositions calculated to extract information. But Miss Palliser was not communicative.

'You *must* be tired after your journey. Those railways are so hot and so dusty,' said Mrs. Topman, with a despairing effort to discover whence her unexpected guest had come that morning.

'I am rather tired,' admitted Ida; 'I think, if you don't mind, I'll take a book and lie down on that comfortable sofa for an hour or two.'

'Do, miss. You'll find some books of Mr. Wendover's on the cheffonier. But perhaps you'll be glad to take a little nap. Shall I draw down the blind and darken the room for you?'

'No, thanks, I like the sunshine.'

Mrs. Topman unwillingly withdrew, and Ida

was alone in the sitting-room which her lover had occupied for the last fortnight.

Much individuality can hardly be expected in a temporary lodging—a mere caravansary in life's journey; and yet, even in the brief space of a fortnight, a room takes some colour from the habits and ideas of the being who has lived in it.

Ida looked round curiously, wondering whether she would discover any indications of her lover's character in Mrs. Topman's parlour. The room, despite its open casements, smelt strongly of tobacco. That was a small thing, for Ida knew that her lover smoked. She had seen him several times throw away the end of his cigar as he sprang from his boat by the river meadow. But that array of various pipes and cigar-holders—that cedar cigar box—that brass tobacco jar on the mantelpiece, hinted at an ardent devotion to the nymph Nicotina such as is rarely pleasing to woman.

'I am sorry he is so wedded to his pipes,' thought Ida with a faint sigh.

And then she turned to the cheffonier, to inspect her lover's stock of literature.

A man who loves his books never travels without a few old favourites—Horace or Montaigne, Elia, an odd volume of De Quincey, a battered Don Juan, a worn-out Faust, a shabby Shelley, or a ponderous Burton in his threadbare cloth raiment. But there was not one such book among Mr. Wendover's possessions. His supply of mental food consisted of half a dozen shilling magazines, the two last numbers of *Punch*, and three or four sporting papers. Ida turned from them with bitter disappointment. She seemed to take the measure of Brian Wendover's mind in that frivolous collection, and she was deeply pained at the idea of his shallowness.

'What has he done with himself in the long evenings?' she asked herself. 'Has he done nothing but smoke and read those magazines?'

She took up the *Cornhill*, and found its graver essays uncut. It was the same with the other magazines. Only the most frivolous articles had been looked at. Mr. Wendover was evidently anything but a reading man.

'No wonder he does not like the Abbey,' she

thought. 'The country must always seem dull to a man who does not care for books.'

And then she reminded herself remorsefully of his generous affection, his single-minded devotion to her, and how much gratitude she owed him.

She read all that was worth reading in the magazines, she laughed at all that was laughable in *Punch*, and the long, slow day wore on somehow. Mrs. Topman brought her lunch, and consulted her about dinner.'

'You will not dine until Mr. Wendover comes back, I suppose, miss? You and he can have a nice little dinner together at seven.'

Ida blushed at the mere notion of hobnobbing alone with a gentleman in that water-side lodging.

'No, thanks, this will be my dinner,' she answered quietly. 'Please don't get anything more for me. No doubt Mr. Wendover will dine at the hotel, if he has not dined in London. I shall want nothing more except a cup of tea.'

After luncheon Ida went out and strolled by the river, that river of which no one ever seems to grow weary. She wandered about the level meadows,

where the last of the wild-flowers were blooming, or she sat on the bank, watching the ripple of the water, the slow smooth passage of pleasure-boat or barge, and the day was long but not dreary. It was so new to her to be idle, to be able to fold her hands and watch the stream, and not to fear reproof because she had ceased from toil. At Maulev erer, at this tranquil afternoon hour, while those rooks were sailing so calmly high above her head—yonder belated butterfly fluttering so happily over the feathery grasses—all nature so full of rest—they were grinding away in the hot school-room, grinding at the weekly geography lesson, addling their brains with feeble efforts to repeat by rote dry-as-dust explanations about the equator and the torrid zone, latitude, longitude, winds and tides, the height of mountains, the population of towns, manufactures, creeds; not trying in the least to understand, or caring to remember; only intent on getting over to-day's trouble and preparing in some wise to meet the debts of to-morrow.

'Oh, thank God, to have got away from that treadmill,' said Ida, looking up at the blue, bright sky;

'can I ever be sufficiently grateful to Providence, and to the man whose love has rescued me?'

Her deliverer came strolling across the fields in quest of her, presently, tired and dusty, but delighted to be with her again.

He sat down by her side, and put his arm round her waist for the first time in his life.

'Don't,' he said, as she instinctively recoiled from him; 'you are almost my own now. I have got the licence, I have seen the parson, and he is quite charmed at the idea of marrying us to-morrow morning. He had heard of your little escapade, it seems, and he thinks we are doing quite the wisest thing possible.'

'He had heard—already!' exclaimed Ida, deeply mortified. 'Has Miss Pew been calling out my delinquencies from the house-top? Oh, no, I understand. Tuesday is Mr. Daly's afternoon for Bible class, and he has been at the school.'

'Exactly; and Miss Pew unburdened her mind to him.'

'Did he think me a dreadful creature?'

'He thinks you charming, but that I ought to

have gone to the hall-door when I courted you; as I should have done, dearest, only I wanted to be sure of you first. He was all kindness, and will marry us quietly at nine o'clock to-morrow, just after Matins, when there will be nobody about to stare at us; and he has promised to say nothing about our marriage until we give him leave to make the fact public.'

'I am glad of that, said Ida, looking at her shabby gown. 'Do you think it will matter much, will you be very much ashamed of me, if I am married in this thread-bare old cashmere?'

She had a faint hope that he would exclaim, 'My love, I have brought you a wedding dress from Regent Street, come and see it.' But he only smiled at her tenderly, and said—

'The gown does not matter a jot; you are lovelier in your shabby frock than any other bride in satin and pearls. And some of these days you shall have smart frocks.'

He said it hopefully, but as if it were a remote contingency.

He spoke very much as her impecunious father

might have spoken. He, the master of Wendover Abbey, to whom the possession of things that money could buy must needs be a dead certainty. But it was evidently a part of his character to make light of his wealth; assuredly a pleasant idiosyncrasy.

They dawdled about on the bank for half an hour or so, talking somewhat listlessly, for Ida was depressed and frightened by the idea of that fateful event, giving a new colour to all her life to come, which was so soon to happen. Brian was very kind, very good to her; she wished with all her heart that she had loved him better; yet it seemed to her that she did love him—a little. Surely this feeling was love, this keen sense of obligation, this warm admiration for his generous and loyal conduct. Yes, this must be love. And why, loving him, should she feel this profound melancholy at the idea of a marriage which satisfied her loftiest ambition?

Perhaps the cause of her depression lay in the strangeness of this sudden union, its semi-clandestine character, her loneliness at a crisis in life when most

girls are surrounded by friends. Often in her reckless talk with Bessie Wendover she had imagined her marriage. She would marry for money. Yes, the soap-boiler, the candlestick maker—anybody. It should be a splendid wedding—a dozen of the prettiest girls at Mauleverer for her bridesmaids, bells ringing, flowers strewn upon her pathway, carriage and four, postillions in blue jackets and white favours all the world and his wife looking on and wondering at her high fortune. This is how fancy had painted the picture when Ida discoursed of her future in the butterfly-room at Mauleverer; Miss Rylance listening and making sarcastic comments; Bessie in fits of smothered laughter at all the comic touches in the description; for did not true-hearted Bessie know that the thing was a joke, and that her noble Ida would never so degrade herself as to marry for money? And now Ida was going to do this thing, scarcely knowing why she did it, not at all secure in her own mind of future happiness; not with unalloyed pride in her conquest, but yielding to her lover because he was the first who had ever asked her; because he was warm and true when all else

in life seemed cold and false ; and because the alternative—return to the poor home—was so dreary.

The conversation flagged as the lovers walked in the twilight. The sun was sinking behind the low hedge of yonder level meadow. Far away in mountainous regions the same orb was setting in rocky amphitheatres, distant, unapproachable. Here in this level land he seemed to be going down into a grave behind that furthest hedge.

It was a lovely evening—orange and rosy lights reflected on the glassy river, willows stirred with a murmurous movement by faintest zephyrs—a wind no louder than a sigh. Brian proposed that they should go on the river ; his boat was there ready, it was only to step into the light skiff, and drift lazily with the stream.

They got into the Abbey river, among water-lilies whose flowers had all died long ago, face downwards. The season of golden flowers, buttercup, marsh-mallow, was over. The fields were grayish-green, with ruddy tinges here and there. The year was fading.

Ida sat in dead silence watching the declining light, one listless hand dipping in the river.

Brian was thoughtful, more thoughtful than she had known him in any period of their acquaintance.

'Where shall we go for our honeymoon?' he asked abruptly, jingling some loose coins in his pocket.

'Oh, that is for you to decide. I—I know what I should like best,' faltered Ida.

'What is that?'

'I should like you to take me to Dieppe, where we could see my father, and explain everything to him.'

'Did you write to him to-day?'

'No; I thought I would tell him nothing till after our marriage. You might change your mind at the last.'

'Cautious young party,' said Brian, laughing. 'There is no fear of that. I am too far gone in love for that. For good or ill I am your faithful slave. Yes, we will go to Dieppe if you like. It is late in the year for a place of that kind; but what do we care for seasons? Do you think your father and I will be able to get on?'

'My father is the soul of good nature. He would

get on with anyone who is a gentleman, and I am sure he will like you very much. My stepmother is —well, she is rather vulgar. But I hope you won't mind that. She is very warm-hearted.'

'Vulgarians generally are, I believe,' answered Brian lightly. 'At least, one is always told as much. It is hard that the educated classes should monopolize all the cold hearts. Vulgar but warm-hearted—misplaces her aspirates—but affectionate! That is the kind of thing one is told when Achilles marries a housemaid. Never mind, Ida dearest, I feel sure I shall like your father; and for his sake I will try to make myself agreeable to his wife. And your little brother is perfection. I have heard enough about him from those dear lips of yours.'

'He is a darling little fellow, and I long to see him again. How I wish they could all be with me to-morrow!'

'It would make our wedding more domestic, but don't you think it would vulgarize it a little?' said Brian. 'There is something so sweet to me in the idea of you and me alone in that little church, with no witnesses but the clerk and the pew-opener.'

'And God!' said Ida, looking upward.

'Did you ever read the discourses of Colonel Bob Ingersoll?' asked Brian, smiling at her.

'No; what has that to do with it?'

'He has curious ideas of omnipotence; and I fancy he would say that the Infinite Being who made every shining star is hardly likely to be on the look-out for our wedding.'

'He cares for the lilies, and the sparrows.'

'That's a gospel notion. Colonel Bob is not exactly a gospel teacher.'

'Then don't you learn of him, Brian,' said Ida, earnestly.

CHAPTER IX.

A SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT.

THE sun shone upon Ida's wedding morning. She was dressed and down before seven—her shabby cashmere gown carefully brushed, her splendid hair neatly arranged, her linen collar and cuffs spotlessly clean. This was all she could do in the way of costume in honour of this solemn day. She had not even a new pair of gloves. Mrs. Topman, who was to go to church with her in a fly from Chertsey, was gorgeous in purple silk and a summer bonnet—a grand institution, worn only on Sundays. Breakfast was ready in the neat little parlour, but Ida would only take a cup of tea. She wandered out to the river-side, and looked at the weir and the little green island round which the shining blue water twined itself like a caress. All things looked lovely in the pure freshness of morning.

'What a sweet spot it is!' said Ida to Mrs. Topman, who stood at her gate, watching for the fly, which was not due for half an hour; 'I should almost like to spend my life here.'

'Almost, but not quite,' answered the matron. 'Young folks like you wants change. But I hope you and Mr. Wendover will come here sometimes in the boating season, in memory of old times.'

'We'll come often,' said Ida; 'I hope I shall always remember how kind you have been to me.'

A distant church clock struck the half hour.

'Only half-past seven,' exclaimed Mrs. Topman, 'and Simmons's fly is not to be here till eight. Well, we *are* early.'

Ida strolled a little way along the bank, glad to be alone. It was an awful business, this marriage, when she came to the very threshold of Hymen's temple. Yesterday it had seemed to her that she and Brian Wendover were familiar friends; to-day she thought of him almost as a stranger.

'How little we know of each other, and yet we are going to take the most solemn vow that ever was vowed,' she thought, as she read the

marriage service in a Prayer-book which Mrs. Topman had lent her for that purpose.

'It's as well to read it over and understand what you're going to bind yourself to,' said the matron; 'I did before I married Topman. It made me feel more comfortable in my mind to know what I was doing. But I must say it's high time there was a change made in the service. It never can have been intended by Providence for all the obedience to be on the wife's side, or God Almighty wouldn't have made husbands such fools. If Topman hadn't obeyed me he'd have died in a workhouse; and if I'd obeyed him I shouldn't have a stick of furniture belonging to me.'

Ida was not deeply interested in the late Mr. Topman's idiosyncrasies, but she was interested in the marriage bond, which seemed to her a very solemn league and covenant, as she read the service beside the quietly flowing river.

'For better for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.'

Yes, those were awful words—words to be

pronounced by her presently, binding her for the rest of her life. She who was marrying a rich man for the sake of his wealth was to swear to be true to him in poverty. She who was marrying youth and good spirits was to swear to be true to sickness and feeble age. A terrible covenant! And of this man for whom she was to undertake so much she knew so little.

The fly drove along the towing-path, and drew up in front of Mrs. Topman's garden gate as the Chertsey clocks struck the hour, and Mrs. Topman and her charge took their places in that vehicle, and were jolted off at a jog-trot pace towards the town, and then on by a dusty high road towards that new church in the fields at which the Mauleverer girls deemed it such a privilege to worship.

It was about forty minutes' drive from the lock to the church, and Matins were only just over when the fly drew up at the Gothic door.

The incumbent was hovering near in his surplice, and the pew-opener was all in a fluster at the idea of a runaway marriage. Brian came

out of the dusky background—the daylight being tempered by small painted windows in heavy stone mullions—as Ida entered the church. Everything was ready. Before she knew how it came to pass, she was standing before the altar, and the fatal words were being spoken.

'Brian Walford, wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife?'

'Brian Walford!' she heard the words as in a dream.

Surely Walford was the second name of Bessie's other cousin, the poor cousin! Ida had heard Bessie so distinguish him from the master of the Abbey. But no doubt Walford was some old family name borne by both cousins.

Brian Walford. She had not much time to think about this, when the same solemn question was asked of her.

And then in a low and quiet voice the priest read the rest of the time-hallowed ceremonial, and Brian and Ida, glorified by a broad ray of morning sunshine, streaming through an open window, stood up side by side man and wife.

Then came the signing of the register in the snug little vestry, Mrs. Topman figuring largely as witness.

'I did not know your name was Walford,' said Ida, looking over her husband's shoulder as he wrote.

'Didn't you? Second names are of so little use to a man, unless he has the misfortune to be Smith or Jones, and wants to borrow dignity from a prefix. Wendover is good enough for me.'

The young couple bade Mrs. Topman good-bye at the church-door. The fly was to take them straight to the station, on the first stage of their honeymoon trip.

"You know where to send my luggage,' Brian said to his landlady at parting.

'Yes, sir, I've got the address all right,' and the fly drove along another dusty high road, still within sight of the river, till it turned at right angles into a bye road leading to the station.

At that uncongenial place they had to wait a quarter of an hour, walking up and down the windy platform, where the porter abandoned him-

self to the contemplation of occasional rooks, and was sometimes surprised by the arrival of a train for which he had waited so long as to have become sceptical as to the existence of such things as trains in the scheme of the universe. The station was a terminus, and the line was a loop, for which very few people appeared to have any necessity.

'Would you mind telling me where we are going, Brian?' Ida asked her husband presently, when they had discussed the characteristics of the station, and Brian had been mildly facetious about the porter.

She had grown curiously shy since the ceremonial. Her lover seemed to her transformed into another person by those fateful words. He was now the custodian of her life, the master of her destiny.

'Would I mind telling you, my dearest? What a question! You proposed Dieppe for our honeymoon, and we are going to Dieppe.'

'Does this train go to Newhaven?'

'Not exactly. Nothing in this life is so con-

venient as that. This train will deposit us at Waterloo Station. The train for Newhaven leaves London Bridge at seven, in time for the midnight boat. We will go to my chambers and have some lunch.'

'Chambers!' exclaimed Ida, wonderingly. 'Have you really chambers in London?'

'Yes.'

'What a strange man you are!'

'That hardly indicates strangeness. But here at last is our train.'

A train had come slowly in and deposited its handful of passengers about ten minutes ago, and the same train was now ready to start in the opposite direction.

Ida and her husband got into an empty first class compartment, and the train moved slowly off. And now that they were alone, as it were within four walls, she summoned up courage to say something that had been on her mind for the last quarter of an hour—a very hard thing for a bride of an hour old to say, yet which must be said somehow.

'Would you mind giving me a little money, while we are in London, to buy some clothes?' she began hesitatingly. 'It is a dreadful thing to have to ask you, when, if I were not like the beggar girl in the ballad, I should have a trousseau. But I don't know when I may get my box from Maul-everer, and when I do most of the things in it are too shabby for your wife; and in the meantime I have nothing, and I should not like to disgrace you, to make you feel ashamed of me while we are on our honeymoon tour.'

She sat with downcast eyes and flaming cheeks, deeply humiliated by her position, hating her poverty more than she had ever hated it in her life before. She felt that this rich husband of hers had not been altogether kind to her—that he might by a little forethought have spared her this shame. He must have known that she had neither clothes nor money. He who had such large means had done nothing to sweeten her poverty. On this her wedding morning he had brought her no gift save the ring which the law prescribed. He had not brought her so much as

a flower by way of greeting; yet she knew by the gossip of her schoolfellows that it was the custom for a lover to ratify his engagement by some splendid ring, which was ever afterwards his betrothed's choicest jewel. The girls had talked of their elder sisters' engagement-rings: how one had diamonds, another rubies, another catseyes, more distinguished and artistic than either.

And now she sat with drooping eyelids, expecting her lover-husband to break into an outburst of self reproach, then pour a shower of gold into her lap. But he did neither. He rattled some loose coins in his pocket, just as he had done yesterday when he talked of the honeymoon; and he answered hesitatingly, with evident embarrassment.

'Yes, you'll want some new clothes, I daresay. All girls do when they marry, don't they? It's a kind of unwritten law—new husband, new gowns. But I'm sure you can't look better than you do in that gray gown, and it looks to me just the right thing for travelling. And for any other little

things you may want for the moment, if a couple of sovereigns will do'—producing those coins—'you can get anything you like as we drive to my chambers. We could stop at a draper's on our way.'

Ida was stricken dumb by this reply. Her cheeks changed from crimson to pale. Her wealthy husband—the man whose fortune was to give her all those good things she had ever pictured to herself in the airy visions of a splendid future—offered her, with a half-reluctant air, as if offering his life's blood, two sovereigns with which to purchase a travelling outfit. What could she buy for two sovereigns? Not all the economy of her girlhood could screw half the things she wanted out of that pitiful sum.

She thought of all those descriptions of weddings which were so eagerly devoured at Mauleverer, whenever a fashionable newspaper fell in the way of those eager neophytes. She recalled the wonderful gifts which the bridegroom and the bridegroom's friends showered on the bride—the glorious gown and bonnet in which the bride departed on her

honeymoon journey. And she was offered two sovereigns, wherewith to supply herself with all things needful for comfort and respectability.

Pride gave her strength to refuse the sordid boon. She had the contents of her small travelling bag, and she was going to her father's house, where her step-mother would, perhaps, contrive to provide what was absolutely necessary. Anything was better than to be under an obligation to this rich husband who so little understood her needs.

Could she have married that most detestable of all monsters, a miser? No, she could hardly believe that. It was not in a Wendover to be mean. And all that she had observed hitherto of Brian's way of acting and thinking rather indicated a recklessness about money, than an undue care of pounds, shillings, and pence.

'If you don't object to this gown and hat, I can manage very well till we get to my father's house,' she said quietly.

'I adore you in that hat and gown,' replied Brian, eagerly, dropping the sovereigns back into his pocket; and so the question was settled.

An elderly lady came into the carriage at the next station, and there was no renewal of confidences between bride and bridegroom till they came to Waterloo, nor even then, for there is not much opportunity for confidential utterances in a hansom, and it was that convenient vehicle which carried Brian and his bride to Gray's Inn Lane.

'What a horrid part of London!' exclaimed Ida, with a shudder, for that Holborn end of Gray's Inn is not lovely, least of all so to eyes accustomed to green fields and the gracious curves and reaches of a silvery stream. "Surely you do not live here?'

'Yes, I do, when I am in town,' answered Brian, 'and it's not half a bad place to live in, as you'll see presently.'

They alighted at a door in Verulam Buildings, a very dull and dingy row of houses on this side, but pleasant enough facing the famous garden where Bacon mused and philosophized in the golden age of learning. Brian led his wife up the uncarpeted stair to the second floor, where he ushered her into a room with two old-fashioned

windows looking out upon grass, and trees, and old-fashioned buildings, all grave and gray, and having an air of sober peacefulness, as of a collegiate or monastic seclusion.

'What a nice old place!' said Ida, looking down at the garden. 'How quiet, how grave, how learned looking! I don't wonder you like this *pied-à-terre* in London, as a change from your grand old Abbey.'

Brian gave a little nervous cough, as if something were choking him. He came to the window, and put his arm round his wife's waist.

'Ida,' he began, somewhat huskily, 'I am going to tell you a secret.'

'What is that?' she asked, turning and looking at him.

'The Abbey does not belong to me!'

'What?' she cried, with wide-open eyes.

'You have been rather fond of talking about the Abbey; but I hope your heart is not too much set upon it. You told me the other day, you know, that you did not value me upon account of the Abbey or my position as its

owner. I hope that was the truth, Ida; for Wendover Abbey belongs to my cousin. You have married the poor Brian, and not the rich one!'

'What?' she cried. 'You have lied to me all this time—you have fooled and deluded me!'

She turned and faced him with eyes that flamed indignant fire, with lips that quivered with unrestrained passion.

'It was not my doing,' he faltered, shrinking before her like the veriest craven; 'it was the girls—Urania and Bessie—who started the notion as a practical joke, just to see what you would think of me, believing me to be my cousin. And when you seemed to like me—a little—Bessie, who is fond of me and who adores you, urged me to follow up my advantage.'

'But not to cheat me into a marriage. No; it is not in Bessie to suggest such falsehood.'

'She hardly contemplated an immediate marriage. I was to win your heart, and when I was sure of that——'

'You were to tell me the truth,' said Ida, looking him straight in the eyes.

His head drooped upon his breast.

'And you did not tell me. You knew that I saw in you Brian Wendover, the head of the family, the owner of a great estate; that I was proud of being loved and sought by a man who stooped from such a high position to love me, who renounced the chance of a brilliant marriage to marry me, a penniless nobody! You knew that it was in that character I admired you and respected you, and was grateful to you! Not as the briefless barrister—the man without means or position!'

'You harped a good deal upon the Abbey. But I had some right to suppose you liked me for my own sake, and that you would forgive me for a stratagem which was prompted by my love for you. How could I know that you looked upon marriage as a matter of exchange and barter?'

'No,' said Ida, bitterly. 'You are right. You could not know how mean I am. I did not know it myself till now. And now,' she pursued, with flashing eyes, with a look in her splendid face that seemed to blight and wither him, with all

her beauty, all her womanhood up in arms against him, 'and now to punish you for having kept the truth from me, I will tell *you* the truth—plainly. I have never cared one straw for you. I thought I did while I still believed you Brian Wendover of the Abbey. I was dazzled by your position; I was grateful in advance for all the good things that your wealth was to bring me. I tried to delude myself into the belief that I really loved you; but the voice of my conscience told me that it was not so, that I was, in sober truth, the basest of creatures—a woman who marries for money. And now, standing here before you, I know what a wretch I seem—what a wretch I am.'

'You are my wife,' said Brian, trying to take her hand; 'and we must both make the best of a bad bargain.'

'Your wife?' she echoed, in a mocking voice.

'Yes, my very wife, Ida. The knot that was tied to-day can only be loosened by death—or dishonour.'

'You have married me under a false name.'

'No, I have not. You married Brian Walford Wendover. There is no other man of that name.'

'You have cheated me into a miserable marriage. I will never forgive that cheat. I will never acknowledge you as my husband. I will never bear your name, or be anything to you but a stranger, except that I shall hate you all the days of my life. That will be the only bond between us,' she added, with a bitter laugh.

'Come, Ida,' said Brian, soothingly, feeling himself quite able to face the situation now the first shock was over, 'I was prepared for you to be disappointed—to be angry, even; but you are carrying matters a little too far. Even your natural disappointment can hardly excuse such language as this. I am the same man I was yesterday morning when I asked you to marry me.'

'No, you are not. I saw you in a false light—glorified by attributes that never belonged to you.'

'In plain words, you thought me the owner of a big house and a fine income. I am neither; but I am the same Brian Wendover, for all that

—a briefless barrister, but with some talent; not without friends; and with as fair a chance of success as most young men of my rank.'

'You are an idler—I have heard that from your uncle—self-indulgent, fond of trivial pleasures. Such men never succeed in life. But if you were certain to be Lord Chancellor—if you could this moment prove yourself possessed of a splendid fortune—my feelings would be unchanged. You have lied to me as no gentleman would have lied. I will own no husband who is not a gentleman.'

'You carry things with a high hand,' said Brian, with sullen wrath; and then love prevailed over anger, and he flung himself on his knees at her feet, clasping her reluctant hands, urging every impassioned argument which young lips could frame; but to all such prayers she was marble. 'You are my wife,' he pleaded; 'you are my snared bird; your wings are netted, darling. Do you think I will let you go? Yes, I was false, but it was love made me deceive you. I loved you so well that I dared not risk losing you.'

'You have lost me for ever,' she cried, breaking from him and moving towards the door; 'perhaps, had you been loyal and true, you might have taught me to love you for your own sake. Women are easier won by truth than falsehood.'

'It seems to me they are easier won by houses and lands,' answered Brian, with a sneer.

And then he followed her to the door, caught her in his arms, and held her against his passionately beating heart, covering her angry face with kisses.

'Let me go!' she cried, tearing herself from his arms, with a shriek of horror; 'your kisses are poison to me. I hate you—I hate you!'

He recoiled a few paces, and stood looking at her with a countenance in which the passionate love of a moment ago gave place to gloomy anger.

'So be it,' he said; 'if we cannot be friends we must be enemies. You reveal your character with an admirable candour. You did not mind marrying a man who was absolutely repulsive to you—whose kisses are poison—so long as you

thought he was rich. But directly you are told he is poor you inform him of your real sentiments with a delightful frankness. Suppose this confession of mine were a hoax, and that I really were the wealthy Brian after all—playing off a practical joke to test your feelings—what a sorry figure you would cut!'

'Despicable,' said Ida, with her hand on the handle of the door. 'Yes, I know that. I despise and loathe myself as much as I despise and loathe you. I have drained the cup of poverty to the dregs, and I languished for the elixir of wealth. When you asked me to marry you, I thought Fate had thrown prosperity in my way—that it would be to lose the golden chance of a lifetime if I refused you.'

'Not much gold about it,' said Brian, lightly.

He had one of those shallow natures to which the tragedy of life is impossible. He was disappointed—angry at the turn which affairs had taken; but he was not reduced to despair. To take things easily had been his complete code of morals and philosophy from earliest boyhood.

He was not going to break his heart for any woman, were she the loveliest, the cleverest, the noblest that ever the gods endowed with their choicest gifts. She might be ever so fair, but if she were not fair for him she was, in a manner, non-existent. Life, in his philosophy, was too short to be wasted in following phantoms.

'You must have thought me a mean cad this morning, when I offered you a couple of sovereigns,' he said; 'yet they constituted a third of my worldly possessions, and I was sorely puzzled how we were to get to Dieppe on less than four pounds. I have been living from hand to mouth ever since I left the university, picking up a few pounds now and then by literature, writing criticisms for a theatrical journal, and so on—by no means a brilliant living. Perhaps, after all, it is as well you take things so severely,' he added, with a sneer. 'If we had been well disposed towards each other, we must have starved.'

'I could have lived upon a crust with a husband whom I loved and respected; but not

with a man who could act a lie, as you did,' said Ida.

She took her bag from the chair where Brian had thrown it as they entered the room, and went out on the landing.

'Good-bye, Mrs. Wendover,' he called after her; 'let me know if I can ever be of any use to you.

She was going downstairs by this time, and he was looking down at her across the heavy old banister rail.

'I suppose you are going straight to your father's?'

'Yes.'

'Hadn't you better stop and have some lunch? The train doesn't go for hours.'

'No, thanks.'

The gray gown fluttered against the sombre brown panelling as his wife turned the corner of the lower landing and disappeared from his view —perhaps for ever.

Brian went back to his room, and stood in the middle of it, looking round him with a contemplative air. It was a pleasant room, arranged

with rather a dandified air—pipes, walking-sticks, old engravings, *bric-à-brac*—the relics of his college life.

'Well, if she had been more agreeable I should have had to get new rooms, and that would have been a bore,' he said to himself; and then he sank into a chair, gave a laugh that was half a sob, and wiped a mist of tears from his eyes.

'What fools we have both been!' he muttered to himself. 'I knew she was in love with the Abbey; but I don't believe a word she says about hating me!'

And yet—and yet—she had seemed very much in earnest when she tore herself from his arms with that agonised shriek.

CHAPTER X.

A BAD PENNY.

Ida hurried along the shabby, squalid looking street towards Holborn, hardly knowing where she was going or what she was going to do. The airy castle which she had built for herself had fallen about her ears, and she was left standing amidst the ruins. Wendover Abbey, wealth, position, independence, the world's respect were all as far from her as they had been a month ago. Her sense of disappointment was keen, but not so keen as the sense of her self-abasement. Her own character stood revealed to herself in all its meanness—its sordid longing for worldly wealth —its willingness to stoop to falsehood in the pursuit of a woman's lowest aim, a good establishment. Seen in the light of abject failure, the scheme of her life seemed utterly detestable.

Success would have gilded everything. As the wife of the rich Brian she would have done her duty in all wifely meekness and obedience, and would have gone down to the grave under the comforting delusion that she had in no wise forfeited honour or self-respect. Cheated, duped, degraded, she now felt all the infamy implied in her willingness to marry a man for whom she cared not a straw.

'Oh, it was cruel, iniquitous,' she said to herself, as she hurried along the dusty pavement, impelled by agitated thoughts, 'to trade upon my weakness—my misery—to see me steeped to the lips in odious poverty, and to tempt me with the glitter of wealth. I never pretended to love him—never—thank God for that! I let him tell me that he loved me, and I consented to be his wife; but I pretended no love on my side. Thank God for that! He cannot say that I lied to him.'

She stood in broad, busy Holborn, with all the traffic hastening by her, staring helplessly at the cabs and omnibuses, wagons, carriages stream-

ing east and west under the murky London sky, vaguely wondering what she was to do next.

He—her husband—had asked her if she were going back to her father, and she had said 'Yes.' Indeed it was the only course open to her. She must go home and face the situation, and accept any paternal reproof that might be offered her. She had lost a day. No doubt Miss Pew's indictment would have arrived before her; and she would have to explain her conduct to father and step-mother. But the little white-walled house near Dieppe was the only shelter the universe held for her, and she must go there.

'Wendover Abbey!' she repeated to herself. 'I the mistress of Wendover Abbey! That was too good a joke. Why did I not see the folly of such a dream? But it was just like other dreams. When one dreams one is a queen, or that one can fly, there is no consciousness of the absurdity of the thing.'

She stood staring at the omnibuses till the conductor of one that was nearly empty murmured invitingly in her ear, 'London Bridge?'

It was the place to which she wanted to go. She nodded to the man, who opened his door and let her in.

She was at the station at a quarter to four, and the train for Newhaven did not leave till seven —a long dismal stretch of empty time to be lived through. But she could not improve her situation by going anywhere else. The station, with its dingy waiting-rooms and garish refreshment room, was as good an hotel for her as any other. She was faint for want of food, having taken nothing since her apology for breakfast at seven o'clock.

'Can one get a cup of tea here?' she asked of the dry-as-dust matron in charge of the waiting-room; whereupon the matron good-naturedly offered to fetch her some tea.

'If you would be so kind,' she faltered, too exhausted to speak above a whisper; 'I don't like going into that crowded refreshment room.'

'No, to be sure—not much used to travelling alone, I daresay. You will be better when you've had a cup of tea.'

The tea, with a roll and butter, revived exhausted

nature. Ida paid for this temperate refreshment, went to the booking-office, made some inquiries about her ticket, and bought herself a book at the stall, wherewith to beguile the time and to distract her mind from brooding on its own miseries.

She felt it was a frightful extravagance as she paid away two of Miss Cobb's shillings for Bulwer's 'Caxtons;' but she felt also that to live through those three tedious hours without such aid would be a step on the road to a lunatic asylum.

Armed with her book, she went back to the waiting-room, settled herself in a corner of the sofa, and remained there absorbed, immovable; while travellers came and went, all alike fussy, flurried, and full of their own concerns—not one of them stopping to notice the pale tired-looking girl reading in the remotest corner of the spacious room.

A somewhat stormy passage brought the boat which carried Ida and her fortunes to straggling, stony, smelly Dieppe, now abandoned to its native population, and deprived of that flavour of fashion which pervades its beach in the brighter months

of August and September. The town looked gray, cold, and forbidding in the bleak October morning, when Ida found herself alone amidst its stoniness, the native population only just beginning to bestir itself in the street above the quay, and making believe, by an inordinate splashing and a frantic vehemence in the use of birch-brooms, to be the cleanest population under the sun; an assertion of superiority somewhat belied by an all-pervading odour of decomposed vegetable matter, a small heap of which refuse, including egg-shells and fishy offal—which the town in the matutinal cleansing process offered up to the sun-god as incense upon an altar—lay before every door, to be collected by the local scavenger at his leisure, or to be blown about and disseminated by the winds of heaven.

Alone upon the stony quay, in the freshness and chilliness of early morning, Ida took temporary refuge in the humblest *café* she could find, where a feeble old woman was feebly brooming the floor, and where there was no appearance of any masculine element. Here she expended another

of Miss Cobb's shillings upon a cup of coffee and a roll. She had spent five and twenty shillings for her second-class ticket. The debt to Miss Cobb now amounted to a sovereign and a half; and Ida Palliser thought of it with an aching sense of her own helplessness to refund so large a sum. Yesterday morning, believing herself about to become the wife of a rich man, she had thought what fun it would be to send 'Cobby' a five-pound note in the prettiest of ivory purses from one of those shops in the street yonder.

She drank her coffee slowly, not anxious to hasten the hour of a home-coming which could not be altogether pleasant. She was as fond of her father as adverse circumstances had allowed her to be; she adored her half-brother, and was not unkindly disposed towards her step-mother. But to go back to them penniless, threadbare, disgraced—to go back to be a burden upon their genteel poverty. That was bitter.

She had made up her mind to walk to Les Fontaines rather than make any further inroad upon Miss Cobb's purse for coach-hire. What was she

that she should be idle or luxurious, or spare the labour of her young limbs? She went along the narrow stony street where the shops were only now being opened, past the wide market where the women were setting out their stalls in front of the fine old church, and where Duguesclin, heroic and gigantic, defied the stormy winds that had ruffled his sculptured hair.

Two years and a half ago it had been a treat to her to walk in that market-place, hanging on her father's arm, to stand in the sombre stillness of that solemn cathedral, while the organ rolled its magnificent music along the dusky aisles. They two had chaffered for fruit at those stalls, laughing gaily with the good-tempered countrywomen. They had strolled on the beach and amused themselves economically, from the outside, with the diversions of the *établissement*. An afternoon in Dieppe had meant fun and holiday-making. Now she looked at the town with weary eyes, and thought how dull and shabby it had grown.

The walk to Les Fontaines, along a white dusty road, seemed interminable. If she had not been

told again and again that it was only four miles from the town to the village, she would have taken the distance for eight—so long, so weary seemed the way. There were hills in the background, hills right and left of her, orchards, glimpses of woodland—here and there a peep of sea—a pretty enough road to be whirled along in a comfortable carriage with a fast horse, but passing flat, stale, and unprofitable to the heavy-hearted pedestrian.

At last the little straggling village, the half-dozen new houses—square white boxes, which seemed to have been dropped accidentally in square enclosures of ragged garden—white-walled penitentiaries on a small scale, deriving an air of forced liveliness from emerald-green shutters, here a tree, and there a patch of rough grass, but never a flower—for the scarlet geraniums in the plaster vases on the wall of the grandest of the mansions had done blooming, and beyond scarlet geraniums on the wall the horticultural taste of Les Fontaines had never risen. The old cottages, with heavy thatched roofs and curious attic windows, with fruit trees sprawling over the walls, and orchards in the rear, were better than the new

villas; but even these lacked the neatness and picturesque beauty of an English cottage in a pastoral landscape. There was a shabby dustiness, a barren, comfortless look about everything; and the height of ugliness was attained in the new church, a plastered barn, with a gaudily painted figure of our Blessed Lady in a niche above the door, all red and blue and gold, against the white-washed wall.

Ida thought of Kingthorpe,—the rustic inn with its queer old gables, shining lattices, quaint dovecots, the green, the pond, with its willowy island, the lovely old Gothic church—solid, and grave, and gray—calm amidst the shade of immemorial yews. The country about Les Fontaines was almost as pretty as that hilly region between Winchester and Romsey; but the English village was like a gem set in the English landscape, while the French village was a wart on the face of a smiling land.

'Why call it Les Fontaines?' Ida wondered, in her parched and dusty weariness. 'It is the dryest village I ever saw; and I don't believe there is anything like a fountain within a mile.'

Her father's house was one of the white boxes

with green shutters. It enjoyed a dignified seclusion behind a plaster wall, which looked as if anyone might knock it down in very wantonness. The baby-boy had varied the monotony of his solitary sports by picking little bits out of it. There was a green door opening into this walled forecourt or garden, but the door was not fastened, so Ida pushed it open and went in. The baby-boy, now a sturdy vagabond of five years old, was digging an empty flower-bed. He caught sight of his sister, and galloped off into the house before she could take him in her arms, shouting 'Maman, une dame —une dame! lady, lady, lady!' exercising his lungs upon both those languages which were familiar to his dawning intelligence.

His mother came out at his summons, a pretty, blue-eyed woman with an untidy gown and towzley hair, aged and faded a little since Ida had seen her.

'Oh, Ida,' she said, kissing her step-daughter heartily enough, despite her reproachful tone, 'how could you go on so? We have had such a letter from Miss Pew. Your father is awfully cut up. And we were expecting you all yesterday. He went

to Dieppe to meet the afternoon boat. Where have you been since Tuesday?'

'I slept at the lock-house with a nice civil woman, who gave me a night's lodging,' said Ida, somewhat embarrassed by this question.

'But why not have come home at once, dear?' asked the stepmother mildly. She always felt herself a poor creature before her Juno-like daughter.

'I was flurried and worried—hardly knew what I was doing for the first few hours after I left Mauleverer; and I let the time slip by till it was too late to think of travelling yesterday,' answered Ida. 'Old Pew is a demon.'

'She seems to be a nasty unkind old thing,' said Mrs. Palliser; 'for, after all, the worst she can bring against you is flirting with your friend's cousin. I hope you are engaged to him, dear; for that will silence everybody.'

'No, I am not engaged to him—he is nothing to me,' answered Ida, crimsoning; 'I never saw him, except in Fraulein's company. Neither you nor my father would like me to marry man without sixpence.'

'But in Miss Pew's letter she said you declared you were engaged to Mr. Wendover of the Abbey, a gentleman of wealth and position. She was wicked enough to say she did not believe a word you said; but still, Ida, I do hope you were not telling falsehoods.'

'I hardly knew what I said,' replied Ida, feeling the difficulties of her position rising up on every side and hemming her in. She had never contemplated this kind of thing when she repudiated her marriage and turned her face homewards. 'She maddened me by her shameful attack, talking to me as if I were dirt, degrading me before the whole school. If you had been treated as I was you would have been beside yourself.'

'I might have gone into hysterics,' said Mrs. Palliser, 'but I don't think I should have told deliberate falsehoods: and to say that you were engaged to a rich man when you were not engaged, and the man hasn't a sixpence, was going a little too far. But don't fret, dear,' added the stepmother, soothingly, as the tears of shame and anger—anger against fate, life all things—welled

into Ida's lovely eyes. 'Never mind. We'll say no more about it. Come upstairs to your own room—it's Vernie's day-nursery now, but you won't mind that, I know—and take off your hat. Poor thing, how tired and ill you look!'

'I feel as if I was going to be ill and die, and I hope I am,' said Ida, petulantly.

'Don't, dear, it's wicked to say such a thing as that. You needn't be afraid of your poor pa, he takes everything easily.'

'Yes, he is always good. Where is he?'

'Not up yet. He comes down in time for his little *déjeûner à la fourchette.* Poor fellow, he had to get up so early in India.'

Captain Palliser had for the last seven years been trying to recover those arrears of sleep incurred during his Eastern career. He had been active enough under a tropical sky, when his mind was kept alive by a modicum of hard work and a very wide margin of sport—pig-sticking, peacock-shooting, paper-chases, all the delights of an Indian life. But now, vegetating on a slender pittance in the semi-slumberous idleness of Les Fontaines,

he had nothing to do and nothing to think about; and he was glad to shorten his days by dozing away the fresher hours of the morning, while his wife toiled at the preparation of that elaborate meal which he loved to talk about as tiffin.

Poor little Mrs. Palliser made strenuous efforts to keep the sparsely furnished dusty house as clean and trim as it could be kept; but her life was a perpetual conflict with other people's untidiness.

The house was let furnished, and everything was in the third-rate French style—inferior mahogany and cheap gilding, bare floors with gaudy little rugs lying about here and there, tables with flaming tapestry covers, chairs cushioned with red velvet of the commonest kind, sham tortoiseshell clock and candelabra on the dining-room chimney-piece, alabaster clock and candelabra in the drawing-room. There was nothing homelike or comfortable in the house to atone for the smallness of the rooms, which seemed mere cells to Ida after the spaciousness of Mauleverer Manor and The Knoll. She wondered how her father and mother could breathe in such rooms.

That bed-chamber to which Mrs. Palliser introduced her step-daughter was even a shade shabbier than the rest of the house. The boy had run riot here, had built his bricks in one corner, had stabled a headless wooden horse and cart in another, and had scattered traces of his existence everywhere. There were his little Windsor chair, the nurse-girl's rocking chair, a battered old table, a heap of old illustrated newspapers, and torn toy-books.

'You won't mind Vernon's using the room in the day, dear, will you?' said Mrs. Palliser, apologetically. 'It shall be tidied for you at night.'

This meant that in the daytime Ida would have no place for retreat, no nook or corner of the house which she might call her own. She submitted meekly even to this deprivation, feeling that she was an intruder who had no right to be there.

'I should like to see my father soon,' she said, with a trembling lip, stooping down to caress Vernon, who had followed them upstairs.

He was a lovely fair-haired boy, with big

candid blue eyes, a lovable, confiding child, full of life and spirits and friendly feeling towards all mankind and the whole animal creation, down to its very lowest forms.

'You shall have your breakfast with him,' said Mrs. Palliser, feeling that she was conferring a great favour, for the Captain's breakfast was a meal apart. 'I don't say but what he'll be a little cross to you at first; but you must put up with that. He'll come round afterwards.'

'He has not seen me for two years and a half,' said Ida, thinking that fatherly affection ought to count for something under such circumstances.

'Yes, it's only two years and a half,' sighed Mrs. Palliser, 'and you were to have stayed at Mauleverer Manor three years. Miss Pew is a wicked old woman to cheat your father out of six months' board and tuition. He paid her fifty pounds in one lump when he articled you—fifty pounds—a heap of money for people in our position; and here you are, come back to us like a bad penny.'

'I am very sorry,' faltered Ida, reddening at

that unflattering comparison. 'But I worked very hard at Mauleverer, and am tolerably experienced in tuition. I must try to get a governess's situation directly, and then I shall be paid a salary, and shall be able to give you back the fifty pounds by degrees.'

'Ah, that's the dreadful part of it all,' sighed Mrs. Palliser, who was very seldom in the open air, and had that despondent view of life common to people who live within four narrow walls. 'Goodness knows how you are ever to get a situation without references. Miss Pew says you are not to refer to her; and who else is there who knows anything of you or your capacity?'

'Yes, there is some one else. Bessie Wendover and her family.'

'The people you went to visit in Hampshire. Ah! there went another five pounds in a lump. You have been a heavy expense to us, Ida. I don't know whether anyone wanting to employ you as a governess would take such a reference as that. People are so particular. But we must hope for the best, and in the meantime you can make

yourself useful at home in taking care of Vernon and teaching him his letters. He is dreadfully backward.'

'He is an angel,' said Ida, lifting the cherub in her arms, and letting the fair, curly head nestle upon her shoulder. 'I will wait upon him like a slave. You do love me, don't you, pet?'

'Ess, I love 'oo, but I don't know who 'oo is. *Connais pas*,' said Vernon, shaking his head vehemently.

'I am your sister, darling, your only sister.'

'My half-sister,' said Vernon. 'Maman said I had a half-sister, and she was naughty. *Dites donc*, would a whole sister be twice as big as you?'

Thus in his baby language, which may be easier imagined than described, gravely questioned the boy.

'I am your sister, dearest, heart and soul. There is no such thing as half-love or half-sisterhood between us. You should not have talked to him like that, mother,' said Ida, turning her reproachful gaze upon her step-mother, who was melted to tears.

'Your father was so upset by Miss Pew's letter,' she murmured apologetically. 'To pay fifty pounds for you, and for it to end in such humiliation as that. You must own that it was hard for us.'

'It was harder for me,' said Ida; 'I had to stand up and face that wicked woman, who knew that I had done no wrong, and who wreaked her malignity upon me because I am cleverer and better-looking than ever she was in her life.'

'I must go and make your father's omelette,' said the step-mother, 'while you tidy yourself for breakfast. I think there's some water on the washstand, and Vernon shall bring you a clean towel.'

The little fellow trotted out after his mother, and trotted back presently with the towel—one towel, which was about in proportion to the water-jug and basin. Ida shuddered, remembering the plentitude of water and towels at The Knoll. She made her toilet as well as she could, with the scantiest materials, as she might have done on board ship; shook and brushed the shabby

gray cashmere—her wedding gown, she thought, with a bitter smile—before she put it on again, and then went down the bare narrow deal staircase, superb in all the freshness of her youth and beauty, which neither care nor poverty could spoil.

Captain Palliser was pacing up and down his little dining parlour, looking flurried and anxious. He turned suddenly as Ida entered, and stood staring at her.

'By Jove, how handsome you have grown!' he said, and then he took her in his arms and kissed her. 'But you know, my dear, this is really too bad,' he went on in a fretful tone, 'to come back upon us like a bad penny.'

'That is what my step-mother said just now.'

'My dear, how can one help saying it, when it's the truth? After my paying fifty pounds, don't you know, and thinking that you were comfortably disposed of for the next three years, and that at the expiry of the term Miss Pew would place you in a gentleman's family, where you would receive from sixty to a hundred per annum, according to your acquirements—those were her very

words—to have you sent back to us like this, in disgrace, and to be told that you had been carrying on in an absurd way with a young man on the bank of a river. It is most humiliating. And now my wife tells me the young man has not a sixpence, which makes the whole thing so very culpable.'

'Please let me tell you the extent of my iniquity, father, and then you can judge what right Miss Pew had to expel me.'

Whereupon Ida quietly described her afternoon promenades upon the river-path, with the Fraulein always in her company, and how her friend's cousin had been permitted to walk up and down with them.

'Nobody supposes there was any actual harm,' replied Captain Palliser, 'but you must have been perfectly aware that you were acting foolishly—that this kind of thing was a violation of the school etiquette. Come, now, you knew Miss Pew would disapprove of such goings on, did you not?'

'Well, yes, no doubt I knew old Pew would be horrified. Perhaps it was the idea of that which gave a zest to the thing.'

'Precisely! and you never thought of my fifty pounds, and you ran this risk for the sake of a young man without a penny, who never could be your husband.'

Ida grew scarlet and then deadly pale.

'There, don't look so distressed, child. I must try to forget my fifty pounds, and to think of your future career. It is a deuced awkward business—here comes the omelette and the coffee—an escapade of this kind is always cropping up against a girl in after life—sit down and make yourself comfortable—capital dish of kidneys—the world is so small; and of course every pupil at Mauleverer Manor will gabble about this business. No mushrooms—what is the little woman thinking about?'

Captain Palliser seated himself, and arranged his napkin under his chin, French fashion. His features were of that aquiline type which seems to have been invented on purpose for army men. His eyes were light blue, like his boy's—Ida's dark eyes were a maternal inheritance—his hair was auburn, sprinkled with gray, his moustache straw-colour, and with a carefully trained cavalry

droop. His clothes and boots were perfect of their kind, albeit they had seen good wear. He had been heard to declare that he had rather wear feathers and war-paint, like a red Indian, than a coat made by a third-rate tailor. He was tall and inclining to stoutness, broad-shouldered, and with an easy carriage and a nonchalant air, which were not without their charm. He had what most people called a patrician look—that is to say, the air of never having done anything useful in the whole course of his existence—not such a patrician as a Palmerston, a Russell, a Derby, or a Salisbury, but the ideal lotus-eating aristocrat, who dresses, drives, and dines, and gossips through a languid existence.

The Captain's career in the East had not been particularly brilliant. His lines had not lain in great battles or stirring campaigns. Except during the awful episode of the Mutiny, when he was still a young man, he had seen little active service. His life, since his return from India, had been a blank.

His mind never vigorous, had rusted slowly in

the slow monotony of his days. He had come to accept the rythmical ebb and flow of life's river as all sufficient for content. Breakfast and dinner were the chief events of his life—if it was well with these it was well with him.

There was a rustic tavern where in summer a good many people came to dine, either in the house or the garden, and in a room adjoining the kitchen there was a small French billiard-table with very big balls. Here the Captain played of an evening with the *habitués* of the place, and was much looked up to for his superior skill. An occasional drive into Dieppe on the *banquette* of the diligence, and a saunter by the sea, was his only other amusement.

His daughter poured out his coffee, and ministered to his various wants as he breakfasted, eating with but little appetite herself, albeit the fare was excellent.

Captain Palliser talked in a desultory way as he ate, not often looking up from his plate, but meandering on. Happily for Ida, who had been reduced to the lowest stage of self-abasement by her welcome, he said no more about Miss Pew or

his daughter's gloomy prospects. It was not without a considerable mental effort that he was able to bring his thoughts to bear upon other people's business. He had strained his mind a good deal during the last twenty-four hours, and he was very glad to relax the tension of the bow.

'Rather a dull kind of life for a man who has been used to society--eh, Ida?' he murmured, as he ate his omelette; 'but we contrive to rub on somehow. Your step-mother likes it, and the boy likes it—wonderful healthy air, don't you know—no smoke—no fogs—only three miles from the sea, as the crow flies. It suits them, and it's cheap—a paramount consideration with a poor devil on half-pay; and in the season there are some of the best people in Europe to be seen at the *établissement*.'

'I suppose you go to Dieppe often in the season, father?' said Ida, pleased to find he had dropped Miss Pew and the governess question.

'Well, yes; I wander in almost every fine day.'

'You don't walk?' exclaimed Ida, surprised at such activity in a man of his languid temper.

'Oh, no; I never walk. I just wander in—on

the diligence—or in a return fly. I wander in and look about me a little, and perhaps take a cup of coffee with a friend at the Hotel des Bains. There is generally some one I know at the Bains or the Royal. Ah, by the bye whom do you think I saw there a fortnight ago ?'

'I haven't the least idea,' answered Ida ; 'I know so few of your friends.'

'No, of course not. You never saw Sir Vernon Palliser, but you've heard me talk about him.'

'Your rich brother, the wicked old baronet in Sussex, who never did you a kindness in his life ?'

'My dear, old Sir Vernon has been dead two years.'

'I never heard of his death.'

'No, by-the-bye. It wasn't worth while worrying you about it, especially as we could not afford to go into mourning. Your step mother fretted about that dreadfully, poor little woman ; as if it could matter to her, when she had never seen the man in her life. She said if one had a baronet in one's family one ought to go into mourning for him. I can't understand the passion some women have for mourning. They are eager

to smother themselves in crape at the slightest provocation, and for a mean old beggar like Vernon, who never gave me a sixpence. But as I was saying, these two young fellows turned up the other day in front of the Hotel des Bains.'

'Which two young fellows, my dear father? I haven't the faintest idea of whom you are talking,' protested Ida, who found her father's conversation very difficult to follow.

'Why, Sir Vernon, of course—the present Sir Vernon and his brother Peter: ugly name, isn't it, Ida? but there has always been a Peter in the family; and as a rule,' added Captain Palliser, growing slower and dreamier of speech as he fell into reminiscences of the past—'as a rule the Peter Pallisers have gone to the dogs. There was Major Palliser—fought in the Peninsula—knew George the Fourth—married a very pretty woman and beat her—died in the Bench.'

'Tell me about the present Sir Vernon,' asked Ida, more interested in the moving, breathing life of to-day than in memories of the unknown dead. 'Is he nice?'

'He is a fine broad-shouldered young fellow —seven or eight and twenty. No, not handsome—my brother Vernon was never distinguished for beauty, though he had all the markings of race. There is nothing like race, Ida; you see it in a man's walk; you hear it in every tone of a man's voice.'

'Dear father, I was asking about this particular Sir Vernon,' urged Ida, with a touch of impatience, unaccustomed to this slow meandering talk.

'And I was telling you about him,' answered the Captain, slightly offended. His little low-born wife never hurried and hustled his thoughts in this way. She was content to sit at his feet, and let him meander on for hours. True that she did not often listen, but she was always respectful. 'I was remarking that Sir Vernon is a fine young fellow, and likely to live to see himself a great grandfather. His brother, too, is nearly as big and healthy—healthy to a degree The breakfast I saw those two young men devour at the hotel would have made your hair stand

on end. But, thank heaven, I have never been the kind of man to wait for dead men's shoes.

'I see,' said Ida. 'If these boys had been sickly and had died young, you would have succeeded to the baronetcy.'

'To the baronetcy and to the estate in Sussex, which is a very fine estate, worth eight thousand a year.'

'Then, of course, they are strong, and likely to live to the age of Methuselah!' exclaimed Ida, with a laugh of passing bitterness. 'Who ever heard of luck coming our way? It is not in our race to be fortunate.'

The shame and agony of her own failure to win fortune was still strong upon her.

'Who knows what might happen?' said the Captain, with amiable listlessness. 'I have never allowed my thoughts to dwell upon the possibilities of the future; yet it is a fact that, so long as those young men remain unmarried, there are only two lives between me and wealth. They feel the position themselves; for, when Sir Vernon came over here to lunch, he patted my

boy on the head and said, in his joking way, 'If Peter and I had fallen down a crevasse the other day in the Oberland, this little chap would have been heir to Wimperfield.'

'No doubt Sir Vernon and his brother will marry and set up nurseries of their own within the next two or three years,' said Ida, carelessly. Eager as she had been to be rich during those two and a half bitter years in which she had so keenly felt the sting of poverty, she was not capable of seeing her way to fortune through the dark gate of death.

'Yes, I daresay they will both marry,' replied Captain Palliser, gravely, folding his napkin and whisking an accidental crumb off his waistcoat. 'Young men always get drifted into matrimony. If they are rich all the women are after them. If they are poor—well, there is generally some woman weak enough to prefer dual starvation to bread and cheese and solitude. Vernon told me he had no idea of marriage. He and his brother are both rovers — fond of mountain-climbing, yachting, every open-air amusement.'

'Did you see much of them while they were at Dieppe?'

'They only stayed three days. They walked over here to lunch, put the poor little woman in a fluster — although they were very pleasant and easy about everything — invited me to dinner, tipped the boy munificently, and went off by the night-boat, bound straight for Wimperfield and the partridges. Very fine partridge shooting at Wimperfield! Vernon asked me to go across with him and stay at the old place for a week or two; but my sporting days are over. I can't get up early; and I can't walk in shooting-boots. Besides, the little woman would have fretted if I had left her alone so long.'

'But the change would have done you good, father.'

'No, my dear; any change of habits would worry me. I have dropped into my groove and I must stay in it. What a pity you were not here when your cousins called! Who knows what might have happened? Vernon might have fallen over head and ears in love with you.'

'Don't, father!' cried Ida, with absolute pain in her voice. 'Don't talk about marrying for money. There is nothing in life so revolting, so degrading. Be sure, it is a sin which always brings its own punishment.'

'My dear,' said the Captain, gravely, 'there are so many love-matches which bring their own punishment, that I am inclined to believe that marrying for money is a virtue which ought to ensure its own reward. You may depend, if we could get statistics upon the subject, one would find that after ten years' marriage the couples who were drawn together by prudential motives are just as fond of each other as those more romantic pairs who wedded for love. A decade of matrimony rounds a good many sharp angles, and dispels a good many illusions.'

END OF VOL. I.

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